

Semi-Monthly

No.

Novel Series.

162.

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THE BORDER RIVALS.

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BORDEN'S ABS





THE
BORDER RIVALS;

OR,

THE MILL-FLUME MYSTERY.

BY MRS. ORRIN JAMES,

Author of the following Dime Novels:

128. *OLD JUPE.*

129. *WRECKER'S DAUGHTER.*

154. *ROB RUSKIN,*

162. *THE BORDER RIVAL.*

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND COMPANY, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

BORDERS

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1868, by
BEADLE AND COMPANY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
Southern District of New York.

(No. 162.)

THE

BORDER RIVALS

CHAPTER I.**THE SETTLEMENT HOME.**

THE sun had crept around to the back of the house, so that Hetty Barber could sit in the front door and enjoy the cool shade, and the light air which was just beginning to wake up from its noonday slumber at four o'clock of that long June afternoon. She had a white barred-mull apron to make—a great piece of finery in that section of the country—and with this in her hand, and her steel thimble on her dimpled finger, she took her seat on the door-sill, her black hair shining like satin, her cheeks like roses, and her well-starched, well-ironed calico frock looking the perfection of neatness. The “queen-of-the-prairie” which climbed over the door hung rich with its splendid cup-like roses. The vine had plenty of foothold in the chinks of the wall, for the house was of logs—two rooms and a low attic. But Hetty looked like a woodland queen, as she sat in her bower, and no doubt, felt like one, for everybody in that vicinity dwelt in log-houses, and she was *Squire Barber’s* daughter, and so young and pretty as to rule with absolute sway a whole county-full of young men, which was quite enough to make her as independent and tyrannical as *some* people said she was.

Having given her satiny hair a last touch with her white hand, plucked a half-open rose and fastened it in her braids, spread out her skirt handsomely and noticed how nicely her white sewing looked against her pink dress, she threaded her needle, and fell to hemming the apron with little, short, even stitches prettier than those made by the fairy-fingered sewing-machine.

It was one of those perfect days which belong alone to June. The farmers were making their June-grass hay not a great ways off, for the air was full of its delicious odor, mingled with the perfume of the roses, and the sky was a clear, deep blue, like Hetty's eyes. Inside, the house was as "neat as a pin," and cool; for all the cooking was done in the outside kitchen, a few feet in the rear of the house. This attachment consisted of a smaller cabin, where black Martha Washington presided through the day, with a diffusive glory like a sunflower, for she wore always a yellow frock and tarban, and her black face, circled in this halo, shone out as if it loved the warmth and light of this hot June weather.

Martha, now, was in the back room setting the table for the early tea. Hetty, when she looked back through the vista of open doors, could see her passing out and in, and could also see and hear her son, Napoleon Bonaparte, a great awkward, overgrown darky of sixteen, who sat on the kitchen step, with a torn newspaper in his hand, from which he was vainly trying to extract, in this, his hour of leisure, some hint of the mysterious meaning of the poetic column over which he was pausing.

"Looks like dem hymn-books down to camp-meetin'," he remarked, to his mother, as she emerged from the kitchen with a plate of pot-cheese, done up in snowballs. "Mus' be music in 'em; wish I se could squeeze it out."

"You knows hymns 'nuff, now," answered his mother; "you beat 'em all hollerin' an' singin', Napoleon Bonaparte. Massa tol' me, las' night, he'd have to 'strict you to de woods, when you got a singin'-fit on. He ain't no ear for music, massa ain't, though he's a good man an' a peart one."

Hetty smiled, as she listened, through the sunny silence, to the fond mother, whose pride and idol was the ungainly fellow stumbling over his letters.

"Father ought not to shut off his singing, when it's such a delight to Martha," she thought; and then she listened farther and smiled again, as the boy went on with his reading. She, herself, at his request, had taught him his letters, but he had not, as yet, progressed very far in the art of putting them together. He was now engaged in spelling out the title of the first hymn.

Hohen l-i-n-d-e-n," he began. "Wonder w'at dat spell?"
scratching his head, "dat berry long, good-lookin' word—
guess dat hallelujah."

"Dat's so," said his mother, triumphantly.

"O-n—I knows dat, kase Missa Hetty tol' me las' time if I didn' member she'd quit off my eddication; l-i-n-d-e-n—wonder w'at dat is! guess it's linament; looks like it."

"Du's it, shuah."

"W-h-e-n d-e s-u-n," long pause—"mus' be opedildoc; dat ain't no oder kind."

"'Cept Croton oil," corrected his mother.

"Don' disturb me, you puts me out," said Napoleon, returning on the line with his finger.

"De hnament ob opedildoc. W'at dat word got to do wid hallerlujah, maumy? I'se afraid dat fust word isn't right."

"Oh, yis, it is," she said, confidently; so he went on:

"W-a-s l-o-w—w'at's dat, anyhow?"

"I guess it ain't a hymn, it's a receipt for rheumatism, dat's jest it," remarked Martha, issuing forth again with some butter and tea rusk.

"A-l-l l-l-o-o-d-l-e-s-s," went on the youth, noways discouraged. "Dar's two dem s' togedder, a-purpose to puzzle a feller."

"I s'pose dey had plenty, an' used 'em to git red of 'em, as I did dem strawberries las' week. You read beautiful, Napoleon; considerin' you's cullud, an' only Parned your letters dis summer. Put up dat paper now, and bring me a pail o' water from de spring. I wants some cold to set dis butter in."

"Nebber mind de water, maumy. I likes de butter more w'en it's soft. It spreads easy."

"Wal, Miss Hetty don't, ef you do. Better get dat water, quick, else I'll chase you wid de poker."

"L-a-y," continued the dusky scholar.

"Napoleon Bonaparte, ef you don't bring me dat water, you shan't have no butter, soft or hard, for *your* supper," the fond mother added as she placed the pail beside him.

After a moment he arose, with a yawn, and shuffled away for the water. Martha took the opportunity to come through to the "front-room" and say to her young mistress:

"I don't wonder dat boy lazy, he's growin' so He can't b'ar to stir. But his intellects *is* wonderful! He's gittin' so he kin read right off, you jes' ought to hear him."

"I heard him," said Hetty, demurely.

"It's surprisin' how he knows dem long words, an' he's growin' handsome, too—don' you t'ink so, Miss Hetty?"

The least little flicker of a smile played about the corners of the girl's pretty mouth; she would not hurt Martha's feelings for the world, and repressing her inclination to laugh, answered:

"I think he resembles *you*, auntie."

"Oh no, he don't dissemble me; he's better-looking dan I eber were—'speshally his nose—it's mos' like white folks' nose, 'pears to me, Miss Hetty."

Now, as Napoleon had a nose of the pure African type, like the half of a large split pear, Hetty could no longer restrain her laughter.

"W'at for you laugh?" asked Martha, displeased.

"Because I couldn't help it, auntie."

"Wal, he's a good boy, anyhow, Napoleon is; he don't neber give his mudder no sass. An' he's so useful to run o' errands. I don't know w'at de square would do widout dat boy."

"He certainly is willing and good-natured," said Hetty, with a comical consciousness that Napoleon Bonaparte *always* did his errands upside down.

Having relieved her mind of its weight of maternal vanity, Martha stood, with hands on hips, looking over the shoulder of her young mistress. Supper was ready, except those last touches to be given after the squire came in; and she had nothing to do now but pass away the time. She was wont to favor Hetty with her company and opinions, a consequence which grew out of the girl's youth and the fact that they were the only females about the house.

"Dat'll be a right smart harvest o' hay dis ye'r," she continued; "de square will hab to leave de mos' ob zis in de medders. Dey might stuff de barns till de hay bu'st out de doors an' winders, like dat puddin' out o' de bag to-day, an' dey wouldn't hol' half. Dey say Luke Norris is a-gwine to build himself a house dis fall," with a sly look at Hetty. "Not a log-house, neither, but a right-down reg'lar frame

house, wid a keepin'-room, bedroom an' kitchen, an' a spare bedroom in de loft?"

"I've no objections, maumy."

"Lord, I shouldn't think you would have! You ou'der be mighty tickled to hev him makin' seek a fine home for you!"

"For me?" asked Hetty, with the most innocent surprise, looking up at her sable "help" without a blush.

"Yes, to be shuah. Dat's w'at everybody says."

The girl gave a slight toss of her proud head and resumed her sewing as if that were answer enough.

Martha was about to continue her comments when she was startled out of the subject of discourse by the appearance of Napoleon at the back-door, dripping like a water-calf, or an April day.

"Guess you hab hab leetah use de water, maumy, it's awfully roily--'twill speckle de butter all up."

"What's made it roily?"

"Wal, I caught my foot in dat low fence 'tween de tree abt de spring, an' tumbled in. I had to swim a considerable to git out, kuse I went in head foremost, an' I made water rather hardily. It'll settle bym-bye, an' if you kin jist go an' git anudder bucket-full."

"Clear out wid you, an' don't you show yer face on dese premises till it's so dark I can't see it," cried Martha, starting after him.

The boy took to his heels; but Hetty, a few moments later, noticed him, sitting in the old place, the newspaper in one hand, and a large "chunk" of gingerbread in the other. Money was cheap, in those days, and the girl had kept up of a generous disposition, so that Napoleon ran no risk of being retarded in his mushroom growth by lack of sustenance.

"You steamin' like one dem new-tangled booms on de lander," said his mother, in passing him; and, indeed, a bit of thine, drying in the sun, he was surrounded by a faint smoke, like a huge lump of charcoal getting ready to burst into a flame. However, there was no danger of Nap setting the world on fire, by spontaneous combustion, or the blankety of his wits. He finished his gingerbread, and began to sing, in a rich, smooth voice, with a roll of his eyes to ascertain if the squire was within hearing.

The mellow voice melted pleasantly on the warm air; but Hetty no longer heard or heeded it. Sue was conscious of something approaching down the road which set her fingers quivering so that she pricked them, as she tried to sew. This necessitated her bending more carefully to her work, so that Sue did not look up again—not even when the great load of hay, with the two black horses, and the young man driving them, came opposite the house.

Luke Norris, seated on top of the mountain of new hay, could not be certain that Hetty Barber had seen him; but he shrewdly guessed it from the fact of her not looking up; and he was right. She knew the black horses and the wide-brimmed straw hat the instant they appeared in the distance, and had immediately begun to prick her fingers and to sew with an appearance of industry, at a indifference to the other world, as if she had not dressed herself and placed the ring in her hair, and sat there the last hour for no other purpose but that of showing to Luke, as he went by with his hay, how distractingly pretty she could make herself, and how utterly indifferent she was to him! She gave him a good chance to look at her, by not raising her own eyes, and he improved it to the fullest; she knew, albeit she sewed so steadily, that he *was* watching her, and to save her life she could not prevent the color growing warmer and deeper in her cheeks. Luke noticed it, and smiled to himself, afterward compressing his lips and frowning as if seriously displeased at Miss Barber.

The two had quarreled at their last meeting; the girl was bound still to show herself offended, but she hoped and expected, all the time, that Luke would call out to her in his cheerful way, when she designed to glance up as if surprised to find it was he, and to receive graciously such advances as he chose to make.

Not only did he not address her, but she was conscious that she had blushed and thus betrayed herself, so that by the time the huge hay-wagon was well past, there were tears of vexation so blinding the eyes that they could not see the stitches, and big drops plashed down on the white apron, already stained with the finger-prick. Finding that she was spoiling her sewing, she rolled it up and laid it away, hastily

wiping her eyes as she heard Martha again approaching.

"I declar', Miss Hetty, if Massa Norris didn't go straight by wi bout speakin' nor you didn't look up, for I was a-watchin' you. You's done been a-quarrelin', I reckon?"

"Well, auntie, supposing we have?"

"Den you'd better make it up in time for to hab de new house raised 'fore col' wedder—dat's *my* advice!"

"I shall never live in Luke Norris' house. He may build it, or let it alone, as he pleases. Don't tease me about him," said Hetty, rising. "It's time father came home to tea. There he is, now, Martha."

The ingress hurried away to see to her supper, while Hetty put off her work in the bureau-drawer and prepared a smile for her father, though she felt more like climbing the steep stairs to the attic and having a good cry in solitude, than she did like presiding at the tea-table and eating battered waffles and boiled ham.

Indeed, Hetty had a very serious trouble of her own—far more serious than a temporary quarrel with Luke; a secret, which weighed so heavily on her mind that she felt, at times, as if she must share it with Martha, in lieu of any more satisfactory confidence. She dared not confide in her father, for she had no anxiety in hiding such an affair from him, at the best; and it was a matter that would excite his deepest ire. Yet she, in all but this, had been a dutiful daughter; and he was the fondest, most indulgent of fathers.

"Well, Hester, did Luke stop and invite you to the grand Fourth of July picnic, when he went past?" asked her father, as they were seated at their supper.

"No, father. Is it really going to be?"

"Yes, I suppose so, from the talk—a regular old-fashioned celebration. I'm warned that I shall be called on to read the Declaration and make a speech. I thought likely Luke would do just that, so that you and Martha could set about the cake and chicken fixings in time. They were talking it over in the field to-day, and the other youngsters turned Luke over to you—sayin' in' that it would please you both," he gesticuly, looking up to see if Hetty blushed, but she was busy with her tea-cup, and said, with indifference:

"He didn't stop."

"In a hurry, likely," added the squire, good-naturedly. "The boys are working hard this week. They'll deserve a holiday, when the day's all in. Fourth o' July fits in just right, between haying and harvesting."

"Yes, father. Did they have music?"

"They'd take a band from Cincinnati, but they don't much expect to get it. They'll have use for their own musicians on that day. If we don't get a band, we'll have to fall back on our native talent — Napoleon Bonaparte perhaps," said Jim, and looking at Martha. "Does he practice on his fiddle as much as ever, auntie?"

"Dar ain't a cent for a camp-meetin' tune dat boy can't play," she responded, with emphasis.

"That's all right, as far as the dancing is concerned. But we shan't have a band to head the procession."

"Can't let you have no more eggs for walkin' till after de picnic," observed Martha. "I'll want bout two ham hocks for dat occasion, and dar gettin' scarce dis hot weather. Ise got only fifty laid up."

"Then you'd better put your son on short allowance," said Hetty. "I saw him with a pocket full of hard-boiled eggs this afternoon."

"You don't say so, Miss Hetty! Den he's jis' bin b'en in de teakettle w'en my back was turned. I'll have to ask missus to 'tend to him, if he don't carry himself straighter; de fac' is, dat boy done growin' like de mustard-seed in de Bible, an' it 'pears to keep him hungry!"

"I shouldn't wonder," said the squire, drily.

"It's 'nuff to ruin you to feed him, mas-a, I know w dat; but den I don't eat much now-a-days! I git's along on as little as possible, so you won't notice what a pig he makes o' himself."

The squire gave a comical glance at the smooth roundness of Martha's figure and face, and burst into one of those noisy, roaring laughs peculiar to him.

"It's quite affecting," said he, "such a proof of devotion; but, don't quite starve yourself, my good woman. Thank the Lord, food is cheap and plenty out West. I don't complain of Napoleon's eating; but come now, Martha, confess, isn't he rather lazy?"

"He's growin', sah," was the evasive answer. "An' he's a great help to me, doin' chores. I couldn't git along as I do, washin' day an' Saturday, if it wasn't for Napoleon. I left him a-watchin' dat waffle, now; wonder why he doesn't bring it in."

Martha went for the hot waffle, but as she did not return until after they had left the table, the others concluded that setting Nap to turn waffles had resulted in a betrayal of trust.

"Nap," said Hester, just before sunset, after the tea-things were out of the way, and the cows milked, "run down to the Four Corners and see if there's any thing at the post-office. It's time for father's weekly Gazette."

"Yes, missa," said Nap, pulling his wool, and grinning, for he liked to go to the Corners, where he was pretty certain to play mables with little white boys until he had lost all his personal property and forgotten the errands on which he was sent.

"And be sure you don't loiter on the way, Nap. Go and come as quickly as you can. I want to read the paper to father before he goes to bed."

"Yes, missa; I'll be right back in a jiffy."

"Here's five cents to get you some candy; now be sure and come straight home."

"Yes, missa, Yankee."

He set off on a shambling run which lasted as long as he was in sight of the house. The squire, in his shirt-sleeves, sat on the steps, resting after the labors of the day, smoking his pipe and enjoying the coolness and the sweet smell of the bay-bills. His daughter sat beside him, her eyes roving restlessly up and down the road, with a sad look not usual with her. She longed to rest her head on her father's shoulder and cry; but he would have been astonished at such sentimentality, and Hetty's mother had been dead three years. There was no one to whom she could pour out her heart without reserve.

"Aren't you well, little girl?" the squire asked, kindly, after a time, noticing that she was silent and grave.

Her lip trembled, but he did not see it, and when she said, shortly:

"Oh, yes, quite well, father; only the day has been so warm," he took her assertion for fact, and troubled himself no further.

The scene was very pretty from where they sat; so pretty that even the commonplace farmer enjoyed it, hardly conscious of what it was that pleased and soothed him so. A wide expanse of hills and valleys lay at their feet, in the midst of which wound the Ohio river, now glittering rosily in the sunset. Many of the hills were dark with their primeval forests, with fields of grain yellowing between them. Just in front of the house lay a road, as good as any to be found in that not thickly-settled region, and near at hand was a wheat-field, and a meadow newly-mown, from which up-floated delicious perfumes in the cool twilight air.

"I wish Nap would hurry back with my paper," said Squire Barber, presently, with a yawn. "If you had it now, you could read it out here, where it's pleasanter than in the house."

But another hour darkened down in the soft twilight, and Nap had not made his appearance.

"I believe I'll go to bed," said the squire, with a yawn. "When a man rises at four o'clock he's ready for bed at dark. I'll give that nigger a sound thrashing in the morning." And with this righteous resolve he betook himself to the bed to forget all about Nap's misdeeds before morning.

Scarcely had he disappeared, before Hetty saw the dim figure of the boy coming up through the dark twilight with something white glimmering in his hand. He had been gone nearly two hours on an errand which could easily have been accomplished in half an hour.

"What kept you so long? You promised to make haste."

"So I did, Miss Hetty; I'se run all de bres out my body; don' you hear how blowed I am?"

"Then you must have had the longer to stay at the Corners. Father got tired of waiting, and went to bed. Have you the paper?"

"Yes, miss, an' a letter."

"Who for?" asked the girl, quickly, stretching out her hand.

"De prez-massa said 'twas fur Miss Barber."

"Give it to me!"

"Lawz, Miss Hetty, I reckon I'se lost it!"

"Lost it? Oh, Nap, how trying you are! If you've lost that letter I'll certainly get father to give you a good whipping to-morrow morning."

"Before breakfast?"

"Yes, before breakfast. Haven't you put it in your pocket?"

"I had it, back to dem chestnut trees, missa, kase I'se tryin' to read down in' on it, dar, I knows."

"We had better go back and look for it. The moon's coming up."

"I'se awful tired," groaned Nap.

"Come along, this moment. You'll find it a more serious matter to lose a letter than you seem to think. You've always been told how very careful you should be of letters."

"I am keerful of dem you Par' me, missa—I nebber los' none o' dem kind—kase I keeps 'em in my head; but dese oder kind o' letters is so slippery."

"Never mind excuses. Look sharp, now, as you go along."

The two returned along the road looking carefully, in the unbroken light, all the way to the Four Corners, and up to the door of the office, now closed, but nothing could be found of the lost missive. There were perhaps a dozen houses clustered at the crossing of the roads known as the Four Corners; these were already dark, except the bar-room of the tavern, in which a few loungers still lingered. Hetty crossed the street to avoid this spot, returning home vexed, dispeleated and alarmed, for it was not pleasant to her to think that some of her neighbors might pick up the letter and possess themselves of the contents, which some of them would scarcely hesitate to do, the laws of honor not being very strictly defined in that still somewhat primitive community.

"I'se berry sorry I los' da letter, sence you miss it so much," said Nap, as they regained the house. "Ef I knew how I'd write you another jis' as good, Missa Hetty."

CHAPTER II:

THE SHADOW BEHIND THE DOOR.

THE next morning, as Hetty was dusting the sitting-room, with her work-apron on, and a handkerchief pinned over her hair, she was startled by the sudden appearance of Luke Norris in the door.

"Good-morning, Miss Barber," he said, removing his straw hat, with the grace which no one else could equal, and as if the girl thought, he knew what handsome hair he had and wanted to show it; yet, even as she thought of it, she knew it was a libel, for in the manly and fresh face thus revealed there was not the slightest expression of conceit.

"Good-morning, Mr. Norris."

This was being excessively civil, as they usually called each other by their given names, according to the primitive custom of the neighborhood. Hetty thought instantly that he had forgiven her her rudeness on the occasion of their last meeting and had come to ask her if he might wait upon her to the picnic; her heart beat high, and she was quite ready to say that she would go with him.

"I would not intrude upon you," continued Mr. Norris, in the same formal tone in which he had first spoken, "but I found this lying on the road this morning, as I passed along, and thought it safest to give it to you myself," and he held out the lost letter, wet with night-dew and soiled with the print of Nap's candied fingers, but with the seal unbroken.

Hetty had turned rose-red before; now she grew scarlet. She almost snatched the letter from his hand, and her "thank you" was so husky that it is doubtful if he heard it at all; he was gone before she could repeat it, and was climbing into his wagon before she recovered from the first shock of embarrassment.

How "magnificent"—to use the girl's own thought—he had looked, as he stood in the door, with his fearless eyes on her face, his brown cheeks and white forehead, and a certain

manliness of voice and gesture which spoke of innate truthfulness! There was no deception there. A woman could trust Luke with her life's happiness, without dread or foreboding. *But*, she held a message in her hand of which she had better be thinking than of Luke Norris.

With a sigh that was almost a *sob*, she tore her gaze away from the retreating wagon and fixed it on the envelope in her hand.

It was postmarked from a village in the East which had been her home, all the days of her life, until a year after the death of her mother, when her father, lonely and dissatisfied, "took the western fever," sold out his homestead, with its surroundings, and emigrated to southern Ohio. She knew the letter must come from there, for there dwelt her sole correspondent. As she gazed at the firm large characters she knew that Luke must have recognized it as a man's hand; and that he must draw his own inferences from the fact—it being, in those days, not so common an amusement with young ladies to carry on a correspondence by letter with a dozen or so of young gentlemen.

"The sooner he knows it the better. I'm glad he was the one to find it," she said to herself, with bitterness; and seeking her usual refuge, her own little bedroom in the loft, she sat on the floor by the small open window, and, not without a shudder, broke the wafer, and unfolded the ample sheet of letter-paper, folded with art and care. There were not many lines within; her eager, yet reluctant eye soon ran over them.

—, June 1st, 18—.

DEAR HESTER:—I take my pen in hand to inform you that I am well and hope you are enjoying the same blessing, though I have reason to fear otherwise as I have had no answer to my two last letters. This makes me uneasy. Either you are sick, or you are playing false and have got another beau. Be careful how you play that game. You are promised to me, and I demand to stick you to that promise. I'll fight any man on that point. This earth ain't big enough for you to have two loves in.

Anyway, you're too pretty a girl to be trusted so long by yourself. I'm apt to have gone after you last fall but couldn't make it out. Now I'm better prepared. I've sold my place which Uncle J. has left me, and received part of the money down. I start for Ohio next Monday, and you may expect

to see me about as soon as you receive this. When I come the squire must know all at once, as we might as well get married as soon as you can make it convenient. My sweet cousin Hetty,

"My pen is poor, my ink is pale,
My love for you shall never fail."

So long as my name is,

JOSHUA BARBER.

Just then a man on horseback went by, and Hetty peered out of her little window with a startled face; she was afraid it might be the writer of the letter, and was relieved to see old Deacon Turner, whose farm adjoined theirs. For a long time she sat with her face buried in her hand, until Martha, coming to the stairs, called her to come down and help her about getting the fruit-cake together, for the Fourth of July.

"'Twon't be fit to eat, if it don' stand at least a week, an' it's jist that to-day till de Fourth. Ise spry as mos' folks, I reckon, but I can't git dat kind o' cake in de oven, widout a little assistance. Napoleon, he's stumm' the raisins, as fas' as he kin—but he 'pears to get along mighty slow. Come, Miss Hetty, dis minute!"

"Yes," said her mistress, who, in the midst of whatever secret trouble she had, was not yet so overwhelmed but that she was conscious of Martha's lack of judgment in the distribution of the 'parts'—“I'm coming. I will stomp the raisins, and Nap may beat the eggs; my fingers are nimbler than his.”

“Don' know 'bout dat,” grumbled the colored woman as she went back to the kitchen, “his fingers is dreffal nimble w'en dar's any ting good about, or I'm lookin' t'lder way!”

“Where's the raisins, auntie?” asked Hetty, trying to look as if she had not been crying, when she came into the kitchen.

“Here, you, Nap, let Miss Hetty do dat. ‘Pears to me,’ with a suspicious glance from the boy to the fruit, “dis looks like mighty small heap for four pounds—but I weighed 'em 'fore he begun.”

“Weigh them again,” suggested Hetty.

Martha took up her steelyards and weighed the diminished dish.

“Can't make out bat two pound an' a half,” she said. “Cu'tus, isn't it? I di ln' make no mistake.”

"Nap could probably explain what has become of them."

"Napoleon Bonaparte Washington, cl'ar out dis kitchen, and don' you let me see your face dis day!" cried his mother as a sudden conviction overcame her.

Being already stuffed to bursting, and desiring very much to go to the river, fishing, Nap obeyed with more than his usual alacrity; as he went out, Hetty saw a stick of cinnamon protruding from his trowsers pocket, and he left a trail of cloves behind him which escaped from a hole in the bottom of the same pocket.

"Miss Hetty, you's been a-cryin'," said Martha, when the boy was off their hands, "an' you didn't hab no appetite for yer breakfas'. Ef you's been a-flirtin' wi'l Mr. Norris you'd better make it up; you'll neber hab a better chance if you live to be a hundred. You take airs on yerself, missa, kase yer eyes is bright an' yer cheeks red, but dem won't las' always in' Luke's love will."

"I don't think I've flirted; if I have, I shall not be likely to flirt much longer."

"Why, is you an' he gwine to git married, right away, arter all?"

"No, auntie. We will never make a match. I wish you wouldn't always be talking about Luke—Luke! I'm sick of it. How many eggs did you tell me to break?"

"Sixteen. Luke's a good Bible name. But, ef you don't like to hear it, I shan't speak it, he's I've a call to. Mercy sakes, child, how you do jump!" as a gust of wind slammed the door of the house, "It ain't a good sign for you to be gettin' so nervous. I'll hav' to make you some sarsaparilla beer."

But this was only the beginning of Hester's nervousness, which grew upon her as the week progressed. Martha's fruitcake, as usual, turned out to be delicious; and there followed on its track such a wake of cakes and pies, small and large, as would almost have supplied the county if no one else had existed. There was an incessant fine din of beating eggs and pounding spices, accompanied by a din, not so musical, of exhortations and reproaches directed at Napoleon Bonaparte, whose breath was never free from spicy odors, and whose pockets bulged out as if they had the dropsy. About

seven times a day his mother drove him out of the kitchen with the poker, only to call him back in a few moments to split kindling wood, take out the brick oven, bring water and wash dishes, all of which he had the knack of doing as it ought not to be done; having split his toe instead of a stick of wood, set the kitchen floor on fire with coals from the oven, fallen down with the water and broke a large proportion of the dishes intrusted to him. He took his misaps easily, consoling himself with such good things as could be discovered by an observing eye, and applying himself vigorously between his "chores" and the demands of appetite, to his fiddle, which he was now allowed to practice upon unbaked, since it was ascertained that no brass-band could be hoped for on the great day, but that the Four Corners must rely on native talent for its music. What with the influence of the full moon and Nap's violin, all the dogs in that vicinity gave a concert every evening.

"I tink de land o' Canaan about de right tune for 'em to march by, don' you?" he asked his mother, after considerable practice.

"Oh, not on de Fourth o' July, child; dat's fas' rate to keep up an' down to at camp-meetin', but 'tain't suitable for a regular celebration like dat"—auntie meant secular; "you m'st give 'em Yankee Doodle and dat bran new tune of Daily Jim."

"Dar's gwine to be a drum an' fife, mammy."

"Is dar? Dey's splendid for de procession, but, w'en it comes to dancin', Napoleon, your fiddle will take 'em down."

"Course de young belles can't dance to a drum," said Nap complacently. "I 'spec's to be de biggest tool in de party, mammy—that is, one ob 'em—'spec's de square w'ill make de bigger 'cause he makes a speech. But, if de tools was asked, I bet dey would rudder spare de square danse. He'd me one dem poan'-cakes; it makes me dreff'l hungry when in my arm gwine so fas'."

During this period of preparation and excitement, Martha's sharp eyes were not blind to the fact that her young mistress, who was never more industrious or anxious to assist, had lost her gay spirits; that she cried nights, and that she seemed to

think of the celebration more as if it were a funeral than a grand frolic.

"It's jis' last Luke I ain't asked for her comp'ny," said Martha to herself, and this was partly it, but not all.

The young girl's eyes were constantly watching for an expected visitor; she started at every footstep, every knock; she even started and cried out in her sleep. Her step grew listless and her color less bright. Every evening she came to her father's side, buried her head on his shoulder, and sat there, with her heart throb ing violently, trying to gain courage to tell him that cousin Joshua was coming. And every evening the squire grew tired and sleepy, and put her head away from his shoulder with a "good-night, pet," and went up to bed, while the little coward sat and trembled and kept her wretched secret to herself. For the squire hated Joshua Barber, and would not be pleased to see him a visitor under his roof.

It was on the night preceding the Fourth. Hetty had seen the twilight come on with an inexpressible sense of relief, she did so hope and pray that Joshua would not arrive until after the celebration. She wanted to be happy one day more. Yet she knew she would be far from happy even if he did not come—that she should be miserable beyond words. Luke had not been near her since the evening on which he restored the lost letter. In all the consultations and preparations he had taken no part, and the young men of the settlement, supposing that he had secured the prettiest and most popular girl, i. e.: Hetty Butler, had not solicited the honor. Thus the little and beauty was left to her father's gallantry. Not that she cared for that. She was proud of the squire, and proud of being the daughter of the "Orator of the Day"—as prettish enough to affect indifference toward the young men, and haughty enough to give Luke Norris as good as he sent. She was not wretched because she had only her father for a gallant. She had more real cause for uneasiness than that.

That night her father had gone to Le Corners to consult with his committee upon the arrangements for the morning. She was alone on the steps, vainly regretting that she had not yet taken him into her confidence, glad that Joshua

had not arrived, and musing with glowing cheeks and perturbed breast over the little incident which had driven Luke from her side.

Upon waiting on her home from Sunday evening meeting two Sabbaths before, he had tried to take her hand at the gate, an action on his part resisted by her with absolute rudeness. Poor Hetty! She knew what was trembling on his lips to say—she knew that if she yielded her hand, the words, long-restrained by something in her own manner, would at last burst forth, and then she would have to mortify by a refusal one whose pride she could not endure to wound. She would rather hear these words than any other in the world, had she been at liberty to respond to them as her heart dictated; but she was bound—bound in cold, leaden fetters, which were sinking into and poisoning her heart, and she must resist not only the sweetness of Luke's importunities, but the thrilling desire of her own soul. When she so abruptly snatched away her hand, it was as much in the fierceness of her struggle with herself, as it was to prevent him from further committing himself. He, seeing that this was not in girlish coquetry, but in sober earnest, had dropped the little hand, and gone away without even a parting good-night. Since then they had not met, except the brief interview when he gave her the letter. A thousand times since had Hetty acted over that brief episode in her fancy; thought of it with such pain—such delicious memories of the light in Luke's face, the power in his touch, that, had she it to do over again, she felt that she should hardly have resolution to repel him.

"I am glad he took the letter," she mused, as she sat alone in the perfumed darkness; "it will explain my conduct. He will guess the truth without my having to tell him."

Yes, part of the truth, but not all. For how could he guess that Hetty Barber loved him with all her soul while she was engaged to another man? Such a fact would hardly present itself to his mind unless he was told it. Of course she could have allowed him to see that she loved him, and she so wished; but she meant to be faithful to her first promise, and marry Joshua.

"Marry him, if it killed her, as it certainly would!" she

tonight, for young girls are very apt to think and talk lightly about death, when they get into trouble, as if the dark angel always stood ready to help them out of their difficulties. They learn after a time that he is apt to come when least wanted, and to leave those alone who pray for him; and, too, that it is easier to drag out an unsatisfactory, uneventful life, than it is to die a poetic death.

A whippoorwill was singing in the woods, the moon was just showing a yellow arc above the horizon, the roses, touched by the fingers of the dew, gave out a richer color than by day. All was dreamy, mysterious—a night to love and be loved in. Even Nap's violin had adjourned to the Cemars, and Martha, the baker with a long day's baking, had gone to bed, soon to be up with the first sound of the guns to be fired at daybreak.

Hetty's head sunk on her arms, her arms on her knees, and thus she wept, and wept unrestrainedly, as if with the wise purpose of getting rid of her supply of tears, so as to be bright and smiling on the morrow. If she had been looking about her she would have seen a form coming along the road, outlined against the rising moon, which would have made her heart throb; but her eyes were hidden, and the sound of her own low sobs covered the echo of approaching footsteps. Suddenly some one very gently raised her head, turned up her face until the dim moonlight glittered on its tears, then stooped and pressed a quick kiss on her forehead.

"Luke!" cried Hetty, catching her breath, "you must not do that; indeed, I am in earnest."

"I should think as much," muttered a voice from behind the great oak which stood half in the yard, half on the street, but the two most interested did not hear it, did not dream till a spy lurked in the shadow of the tree watching them with mean and evil glances.

"Is it because you are such a prude, Hetty? or—is it—that my fears are correct—that you came out here, but left your heart behind? That bitter has made me very unhappy. I thought, after that night at the gate, that I would never speak to you again, except as a common acquaintance. But I can't hold over, Hetty! I must know the worst! I had rather ask

than be kept in suspense. Sometimes I have thought that you returned my feeling—that you loved me, as I you."

If there had been more light he would have seen the tell-tale crimson rush to her face; as it was, he only saw the hand upheld entreatingly.

"Please don't say any more," she urged. "Luke, you must know that I tried to prevent your speaking."

"You did," he said, bitterly.

"It was because I—because—I am promised to my cousin Joshua. He will soon be here, and then, I suppose, I shall have to marry him. I expect him, every day."

The man behind the tree could make out but little of what was said, they spoke so low; but he had seen the kiss, and could tell that their voices were not those of ordinary, unimpassioned conversation. There was a silence, and then Luke spoke again, trying to steady his voice:

"I wish I had known it sooner. Your father never spoke as if you were promised. He openly encouraged me."

"He likes you very much," faltered Hetty; even then she had not the courage to state that her father was ignorant of her engagement, and had been kept in ignorance because it was known that he would disapprove of it.

"Well, Hetty," he said, after another pause, "shall I take you to the picnic to-morrow, or will you go with the square?"

"I had better go with father."

"Perhaps so. Well; good-night, Hetty."

"Good-night, Luke."

He was gone. She strained her eyes to watch him as long as the uncertain light permitted; then starting up, she stretched her arms out after him, as if she would call him back. The next moment, she had gone into the house, and the spy behind the tree, who had seen all understand the past while, ground his teeth together, as he thought:

"My suspicions were correct. Full time I was in hand!"

CHAPTER III

THE UNWELCOME GUEST.

At the first discharge of the militia's guns, at sunrise, all the windows at the Four Corners flew open as if pulled by one string, even Nap, three-quarters of a mile away, whom his maumy was in the habit of saying it took a yoke of oxen to draw out of bed, springing up as if he had been shot by the home artillery, and had his best clothes on in sixty seconds.

"Hope nuffin' hain't happened to my fiddle," he said, looking about for the beloved instrument; "wouldn't be no Fourth o' July without dat." And so saying, he planted his elephantine feet square on the violin, where he had laid it on the floor beside his bed, "to have it handy." The bridge went down with a crash, but the body was saved by a timely withdrawal of the misplaced foot.

"Jus' my luck," he said, picking up the fiddle and surveying it ruefully. "I shouldn't wonder if de cat had run away wit my red handkercher; I don't see it nowhar. I shan't hab half time to eat my breakfas' if I have to stop to whittle out another bridge. I meant to be down to de Corners by five o'clock. Dey won't be able to do nuffin' 'till I gets dar."

"Ho, maumy, I'se put my foot in it, now," he said, as he tumbled down the ladder into the kitchen after the fashion of a bear coming down a tree.

"Put your foot in w'at?"

"In my violin, maumy. Kin you guess why it's like de creek, las' spring in de freshet?"

"Gosh, Long Napoleon! I'se got suttin' else to do dis mornin' besides boddern' my head over yer ridiculous conondibusses."

"Cos it ain't got any br're, dat's it?"

"Napoleon Bonaparte, I believe you'd make a conondibus bent it if you'se broke your skull. Wat yer gwine to do now, an' what's de Fourth o' July gwine to do?"

"I'se gwine to whittle out anudder bridge, ob course!"

Don' you say a word, onlyjis fix my vittles an' put 'em down where I kin eat as I work. Cu' m up, maumy, so's to save time. I want to git down to de Comers in half 'n 'our."

"Lor', Nap, de citizens won't meet 'till eight o'clock, an' it's ten minutes to five now."

"I want to be on han'. Suthin' might happen, an' I not be dar. S'posin' somebody's gun should bu'st, an' blow dar hand off?"

Hi-ly excited with this supposition he went out to find a suitable piece of wood for the new bridge, while his mother cut up a loaf of bread and battered it, and scrambled eight or ten eggs for his breakfast, to which she added cold ham and half of a custard-pie.

"He'll get awfule tired an' hungry 'fore de collection is ready, poor boy," she said. "He mous' put a few doughnuts inter his pockets to distend him 'till noon."

By the time he had his violin mended to suit him, Nap had ample opportunity to dispose of the light repast his mother had prepared, along with a neat bowl of coffee.

"Ise wish we had a lookin'-glass as big as Miss Hetty's," he said, after the red handkerchief was found and stuffed in the pocket of his long-tailed coat—an old one, which had taken to him from the squire, and which was dear to him as the apple of his eye. "Does de end ob my bandarter stick out as it orter?"

"Oa, yis, Nap, only Ise afraid de boys will look it."

"I'd like to catch 'em at it. Wal, yis, I'll take a few dem don'ts. Now, Ise ready. S'pose you'll be dar, maumy?"

"Be dar? Who d'y'e s'pose is gwine to be trusted with de takin' ob de coffee? an' de settin' ob de tables? Hump-h! D'm hisky white gals, dey'll cut up de cake, an' make de bonquets and gatlers, but wen it comes to de right down work, dey'll be sure and leab' dat for us. Ef I kin git my rolls out ob oven in season, I shall come long in time to hear de squire's speech. It's a great satisfaction to belong to de fes' families, Napoleon, an' I trus' you won't cut up none of yo' anties to-day."

"Yis, maumy."

"Wat you gwine dat way for?"

"Oh, I se dry. I want to git a drink from de spring; de water's cool in de mornin'."

Now the truth was that this young colored Narcissus wanted to use the spring as a mirror; and when he got down there, with a backward look of his eye to see that no one was observing him, he placed himself in a position to catch a glimpse of his red bandanna, protruding from his coat-tail pocket. It did not last out quite far enough to suit him, so he turned it out a little farther. Unfortunately his mind was so intent on the success of his plot to let the substance, and the sound of the water that had so often tipped him up, run out of his memory fast, and plunged him backward into the fountain.

One or two moments later, mammy saw him swimming up to the bank, his clasped hands dripping, while he was drying his wet hair back to dry it in the sun. His white shirt was tucked safely under his arm. "I didn't know you'd be sponging in!" she ejaculated, exasperated. "I wouldn't have had hab time to settle before he riles it up, a-sousin' in it!"

"Why, Mammy, I didn't see you; I looked so much like yourself in a long time," responded the sphyne, as the two sat down on the damp bank. "So I just took off my beautiful ball gown. It was just the same color as yesterday's dress—yellow, with a red ribbon sash, and a variety of lace, and a bow with a star brooch, which was also loosed up; but, Mammy, that old black sofa is really charming. It has a red cushion, and yellow chintz over it. It's a real beauty, and I wanted to have it at the picnic, but I didn't get it, and I'm glad, because of the winds. I don't like to sit in a sofa like that. They had kept her under a small umbrella, and that was the reason to make it blow, but you know, Mammy, you could have seen it. I don't know if I'll ever get another sofa like that again, but I'll never buy another one, unless it's a real beauty."

"I don't care about it."

"Please, Mammy, don't think I'm going to flatter you. All the girls in this town are engaged in that business. I call it overstocked."

"Now, father, you know there's not a girl been slighted as I have! Nobody but my own father to take me out to the celebration."

"How do I know how many you have given the nittin'? What was Luke doing over in this direction last evening?"

She blushed, as she met his inquiring eye; then bowed her spirited head, as she answered:

"Do you suppose I would accept services offered at the eleventh hour? He should not have delayed asking until after I had engaged myself to you!"

"Ah, girl, I'm afraid you're no better than a flirt."

He said this lightly, well satisfied with his hand some and sparkling daughter; he did not notice the tears which sprung to her eyes, nor the momentary quiver of her lip. Hetty had flirted and was paying the penalty.

The people of the settlements worked hard; and when they played, they carried the same *du* into their recreations which made them so successful at their toils. The hottest, longest, most active day of that summer, in the "Miami Purchase," was the Fourth of July. It began early and ended late.

At eight o'clock the people had assembled and the procession was formed, which marched, to the music of a drab and feeble, valiantly assisted by Nap's fiddle, from the Four Corners to a magnificent wood not far away. At nine the squire read the Declaration of Independence. This was followed by patriotic songs, en masse. Then the squire "got off" his speech, which contained considerable humor and elicited "great applause." Then there was more singing, interrupted in the very mid-st of the Star Spangled Banner's exciting strains, to which Nap was playing a piercing accompaniment, by that youth coming crashing down from the limb of the tree on which he had perched himself, and striking on the head on the stump which had just been vacated by the crater. His mother, who was proudly eying his performance, as well as assisting at the singing with all the power of her milk-flow voice, gave a scream and rushed toward.

"Dat boy has cracked his coccaud dis time, shan't?"

"Drit yer hollerin', matmy. My coccaud's all right. Whar's de fiddle?"

That instrument had caught on a branch, and was safe—not a string had broken; but alas, the long-tailed blue was split from top to bottom; no pinning would make it stay together, and Nap was obliged to take it off and go ignominiously in his blue-check shirt.

"Glad I got rid ob dat; 'twas drefful hot to play in," he remarked, with affected indifference, but his mamy knew that for him the sun of that day had set before noon. "Where was it we lef' off, fellow-citizens?—oh, yis—oh, I...g...way dat star-spangled banner yet wave?"

When they had sung everything appropriate to the occasion which they knew, the company scattered though the grove, each one enjoying him and herself as circumstances permitted. A smooth spot, which had been previously selected, was soon filled with young folks, dancing. After every dance lemonade was passed around, a great luxury, and one to which the fiddler was thought to have earned a right, so that he was apportioned a tin cup for his own especial service, and this was filled as occasion demanded.

Hetty was likely to get plenty of exercise, being up at every set; it would not do to accept one and refuse another; and as she was asked continually, he had to dance incessantly. Sam noticed that Luke danced but seldom; that he was pale and absent-minded. The girls teased him about his low spirits, and still his pride did not seem equal to keeping up the dances. Her heart ached, as she secretly watched him. But, if both of them should look "out of sorts" their friends would be sure to put this and that together.

"I wonder if he is not going to ask me?" she thought, as the time passed on toward noon.

Just then he came up and inquired if she would lead off "May-pink" with him; she took his arm, and as they assumed their places, and bowed to each other, everybody remarked what a handsome couple they were and how sure it was to make a match. They danced as beautifully as they looked. Half the "old folks" present gathered near to enjoy the spectacle, recalling the youthful days of their own triumphs as they watched the light-footed couple.

As the dance terminated, and while all were still looking on, a young man, a stranger, made his way up to Hester Barber,

and before the eyes of the whole community, put his arm about her and kissed her, saying in a loud voice, meant for all to hear : . . .

"Why, how do you do, cousin Hetty? I'm glad to find you enjoying yourself so well in your sweethearts absence. We ought to be glad to see each other, who hain't met for two years," and then he looked about him with a smile, to which no one responded, for his countenance was not one to inspire sudden confidence.

Hetty looked as if she would sink into the earth.

"How do you do, cousin Joshua," she said, faintly. "I wasn't expecting you to-day. Have you seen father?" and she stole a frightened glance toward Luke, but he had already turned away, and was affecting to say something to Uncle Ben.

"Not yet," answered the intruder; "where is he?"

"That's cur'us," said one of the bystanders to another; "that chap staid to the tavern last night. I saw Matthew just told gone to his uncle's; 'twasn't far."

The person who had thus unexpectedly presented himself was not a very young man; he was twenty-seven or eight, short, thick-set, with a heavy black beard, hair of the same color, and dark eyes which seemed to twinkle not so much with humor as with malice. He was well-handsome enough according to the opinion of the young fellow standing about, because he wore a large ring on his finger and dangled a gold watch-chain—or what looked like gold.

While all eyes were still fixed upon him and Hetty, Squire Barber strode that way. He did not look around him; but restrained himself as one unwilling to betray his regard at a relative before strangers. . . .

"How do you do, squire?" he said, the smile on his face. His hands—he did not call him a hand; "you is? I've got the western fever, too?"

"So I do," shaking his head, but smiling more than once. "Very bad? I don't know. I don't know. Thank you, squire. Hetty, I don't know." . . .

"No, I've heard nothing about it."

Squire Barber looked at his daughter with anxiety, who was red and pale under his eye; but when she sent the brief smile on the face of her cousin, all her native spirit was up, and

she flashed back at him a haughty glance, which showed him that young and timid as she might be, he could not wholly intimidate and coerce her, unless he played his game a little less openly

"When did you arrive?"

"Last evening. I was too tired to think of hunting you up. Traveling on horseback isn't the easiest way of getting round the world. I heard that you'd all be on hand this evening to the celebration, and I thought I'd wait and rest myself, and give you a little surprise."

"Very pleasant," said the squire, with a face as if he were taking something very unpleasant.

"Of course, squire. We understand that. Quite a crowd, isn't there? Had no idea there was so many people in the whole State; pretty girls, too. Hetty, I'd like to join in the dancing, if you'll give me your company. I suppose I'll be introduced to some of these young ladies, by'n-by."

He took Hetty's hand and led her out as boldly as though he were an old acquaintance of the whole assembly. He was an excellent dancer, although his figure was not good; but for rapid ease of motion, not even Luke excelled him. By the time the "set" was finished, any one of the maidens round about would have been glad to have him for a partner.

Luke did not dance. He leaned against a tree, watching the others. Hetty felt his eyes upon her and her cousin. A thousand times she wished herself at home, shut up in her little bedroom, there with her bursting heart. When the dance was over she introduced Josanna to one of the handsomest girls, and declaring she was absolutely too tired to stir another Carter, sat down on the grass, under a tree, in the heart of a circle of married women, hoping there to find refuge from her father, Joshua, and all. She saw that the squire was very fond of himself; she knew that Joshua's following him to the West would anger him very much.

How, then, did it happen that she was placed in such circumstances? Why should she be secretly engaged to a man whom she did not love and whom her father detested?

It came about in a very simple manner.

At their eastern home she had lived in the midst of a large circle of relatives who had settled near the original home;

stead for three generations, and occasionally had intermarried.

Joshua was one of these distant relatives—cousin he had always called himself, though the tie was not nearer than that of third or fourth cousin, and consisted more in bearing the same name, and descending from the same stock, than from any traceable link of consanguinity. Joshua was not a favorite with the family in general; he was disliked for an unblamed way he had of doing what he had to do—well informed in the way he announced himself to his friends, on this occasion; having first spied them out in the darkness and made himself familiar with their whereabouts and business, before allowing them to know of his arrival.

Squire Barber especially disliked him; himself frank and generous to a fault, he could not look with any favor upon Joshua's peculiarities. This dislike had been deepened by a conviction that the young man was not upright in his business dealings. And when, shortly after the death of his own wife, an uncle of Joshua's also died, leaving a will made in his favor, though thereby he cut off other nephews and nieces who had taken care of him and had superior claims upon his property, the squire did not hesitate to think that Joshua had obtained the drawing of the will in his favor by some culpable means.

This suspicion grew, in his mind, into absolute certainty. He had never been cordial to the young man; now he began to treat him with a coolness which could not pass unnoticed. And when Joshua persisted in coming to his house, in spite of this coolness, and in paying great attention to his daughter, then only sixteen, an innocent child, with no mother to watch over her development into womanhood, he took the matter into his own hands, telling him openly that he must cease his visits.

At this Joshua flared up in a flame of rage, demanding why he should be treated so; and the squire answered that it was because he did not like him—did not respect or trust him. After that, the discarded man staid away from his house; but he did not cease his attentions to Hester. Meeting her constantly at the houses of friends, joining her almost every time she appeared abroad, unaccompanied by her father, he laid siege

to her girlish sympathies in a way quite certain to win them.

Representing himself as an injured and misunderstood person, to whom even her own good-natured father refused to do justice, he appealed most effectually to her sensibilities. She liked Cousin Joshua. She was sorry for Cousin Joshua. She firmly believed that her relatives were in league to persecute him; and that she was his only true friend. She was willing to prove her friendship, by doing him any kindness in her power. As a lover she never had thought of him. He was considerably older, and she had regarded him as a cousin.

But, he had marked her growing beauty, her thousand graces of speech and action, with warmer feelings. Bad men ought to prize chastity and purity in women. Joshua loved Hester with all the passion of which he was capable and that was much, if not of the highest quality. Jealous, grasping, dishonestly untrue, his love was of the same stamp as his mind. He could not endure to have any one else so much as look at the lovely girl he had marked for his own. How to obtain her, was the question. He knew well that her father would never consent to their marriage. All his intercourse with her was so conducted as gradually to prepare her mind to consider the proposition of a secret engagement and runaway marriage. The sudden resolve of Squire Barber to emigrate to Ohio put a stop to these plans.

Joshua was disengaged at the prospect when he found that the family was actually preparing for the journey, and in as brief time as their preparations could be made, would be off to what was then the "Far West."

He only saw Hetty a few times after her father's resolution was taken, and then with poor opportunity of speaking privately with her. Finally, the day before the great journey was to begin, he wrote a note requesting her to meet him in the grove between her house and Uncle Joe's, as he had something of great importance to say.

Sure met him, and he burst forth with the declaration of his love in a manner which overwhelmed her judgment, while it staggered her pity. Hetty was only sixteen, and it was her first ever! To see Joshua at her feet, tears in his eyes,

complaining of how others had treated him, and beseeching her to be less cruel, made her feel as if she must be a very wicked and hard-hearted girl to tell him she did not love him and wouldn't marry him.

She could not like him, and it grieved her for making her his friend and confidante; she was very sorry for him, and when he urged her for an answer, telling her that she was very young, and did not know her own heart, but that he knew she would grow to love him, she did not deny him. She allowed him his own way. He begged her not to speak, at present, to her father, who was so prejudiced against him. This she was quite willing to promise, as she felt frightened at the very thought of what had inspired.

Then he kissed her and called her his promised wife, saying he should write to her every day, and as soon as he could make his affairs at home, he would follow her and try to overcome her father's opposition.

In this way they passed; Henry never having promised to marry her, but she told him often his declaration that they were "engaged." The growing interest of her journey, followed by the need that caused mother's illness, almost drove Joshua from his mind again. When she did think of him it was to find him changeable, and to wish that her talk had not given him such a hold over her. Time or other times in the two intervening years she had received letters from her lover. These remittances always made her feel that she had placed herself in a false position; but she pitied him, and could not bear to write to him that she felt no more, every day, than she did not, and never would, love him.

In the meantime, Henry had been told of it was to come. And how wonderfully did it seem to him! Yet he could not help the exclamation of terror which came over him, when told of the secret history which made up the mystery beneath the admiring glance of Luke Norris!

In the light of this new knowledge began to see how wrong she had done to allow her cousin to sweep such a position toward her. But she had no power to control him, and was afraid of her father's rebuke, when she should make her confession. Thus the time had sped on, she growing constantly

more dissatisfied, as Luke became more earnest in his attentions.

Luke Norris was the boast of the settlement. No man could better swing an ax or handle a rifle; no man was better for a good day's work, or surer for a trifle. In the winter he engaged in the lumbering business, and made money at it, his father having located a large tract of land which promised to become very valuable, lying as it did, directly on the Ohio river. In the summer he busied himself clearing and cultivating a part of this land.

It was now rumored that he had "swapped" some of his "heavy" timber for the light-sawed lumber down at Cincinnati, wherewith the young man would commence the construction of a house—a regular frame house, clap-boarded without, plastered within—an article of luxury and elegance almost unknown in that vicinity.

Of course, then, the young man intended marriage. With whom? Equally, of course, was the name of Hetty Barber coupled with his.

The squire had not come empty-handed to the new community, and had taken his place at once as a leading man. His daughter was worthy to preside over the coming frame-houses. — Hetty, so handsome, so stylish, in every way of so much importance. Even the girls who envied her admitted the equality of the man. The squire himself looked upon the affair as about settled, and was perfectly satisfied with it. When Luke, in a round-about way, had hinted at his intentions, he had, as he told Hetty, not been rebuked by her father.

This was the position of affairs at the beginning of our story.

CHAPTER IV.

A STROKE FOR A STROKE.

THAT was a fine dinner gotten up by general contribution of the young settlement on the occasion of its second Fourth of July celebration. The matrons proved they had not forgotten their old skill, though but few cakes or puddings had been concocted by them of late days. These luxuries had all the more relish from not being affairs of every day. The table was constructed of boards, and the dishes were of various patterns—pewter was the prevailing style, and served an excellent purpose, not being so liable to breakage.

Squire Barber's Martha had the supervision of the coffee. She had learned the art of making it in the South, and the fame of her accomplishment was great in the land. She had succeeded in “goin' out o' de hole's of injerty,” and, what is far more wonderful, of getting that awkward cub of her's safely out with her—just in time to cross the Ohio in an old boat, and find herself stranded on the shores of injury as Squire Barber was trying to re-unite his new household. He was so glad of her proffered services that he made no complaints on the score of Napoleon Bonaparte, who stuck to his mother, as if knowing when he was well off, and who devoted more provisions, met with more accidents, missed more errands, and caught fewer fish than any other human being. He generally spent the most of the summer weather in fishing in the Ohio river, but was never known to bring home a single specimen of his skill. Martha was always boasting “ole square” fried fish for breakfast when Nap should have a day's luck; but he was an unlucky boy, and never had that day. If sucker, cat, or catfish ever did come to his hook, it was roasted and eaten before he came home.

Nap was to give the company the benefit of his music while it partook of the dinner, and to fit him for his strenuous exertion his mother called him aside, laid ... her hand

the summons to the refection was given, and "staid his appetite" with a roast-duck, onion stuffing, and a small rice-pudding. Upon this he thought he could get along until the quality had eaten, and he was at liberty to close in with the remnants.

Martha was in her element, waiting on the table, her spirits exhilarated by the delightful strains of the violin which Nap did play with considerable taste as well as a good deal of native talent. Her coffee was complimented on all sides, and her cake, she was conscious, was the adornment of the tables. It troubled her, though, to notice that Hetty did not eat, and that the new-comer, whom she had told her was her cousin, staid so closely by her that Luke Norris had no chance to pay her any attention. Indeed, he did not try, but took a seat at another table beside a very nice and pleasant, but homely girl.

"I don't like the cut ob his jib," she said, using a nautical phrase she had picked up somewhere; "dem finger-rings, am' his bell ways, as if he was born' to have w'at he wanted, don't impress me. But, he's a Barber, so I s'pose it's all right. Miss Hetty don't look as if she was tickled to def to see him Lordy, w'at's dat?"

It was Nap, who had gone, head foremost, into the barrel of lemonade. Luke, and two or three others, learned in the art had spent some time, a good deal of sugar, and the best box of lemons, in making a barrel two-thirds full of the "delicious lemonade" to be served during and after the repast. Nap, who had already disposed of rather more than a gallon, had his eyes on the locality of the barrel, and when he chose his note to play during dinner, he selected the crotch of a tree about it, where, provided with a Cpper with a long handle, he could shake the thirst produced by his exertions. In attempting to perform the double task of holding his bow in one hand while he held his violin under his chin, and bringing down with his dipper in the other, he lost his balance, and tumbled awkwardly into the barrel.

There was some splashing, and a good deal of kicking, which made it difficult for the bystanders to effect his rescue, but they finally dragged him out by his feet in a

terribly snorting and suffocated state. Nap was saved, but the lemonade was not. It was some moments before he regained his senses. When he did, he gazed anxiously at the scene of this new misfortune, and seeing Luke about to upset the barrel, exclaimed, through his chattering teeth: "Stop him!"

"Don't waste dat goode lemonade! Ef none de rest won't touch it, leab it to me. Ef it's spiled I'll take de consequences."

"I should think you'd have enough for one day?" remarked Luke.

"Not by a jingdoh, suh. I didn't swallow so much as you might think when I was down de bottom o' dat barrel."

"Let him have it." "Keep yo've earned it," cried the company, who were looking so importunately at the accident as to feel quite compensated for the loss of the lemonade. Even Hedy's laugh rang out as joyous and mirthful as ever; Nap was a constant source of amusement to her; she seldom scolded him for his mishaps, seeing that it did not prevent their recurrence, and that, as he said, "he couldn't help it—he was born so." She was in that nervous state which made it easy either to laugh or cry, so that tears of merriment rolled down her cheeks.

"I'm gald to see something give you pleasure," said her cousin in a meaning voice. "My coming don't seem to have had that effect."

She looked down; she could not say she had been glad to see him, and she felt that he must be aware of it.

"He wal see, now, that I don't love him, and will let me free," she thought; but she did not comprehend the nature she had to deal with.

"The boy's broke his fiddle, this time, for certain; so there'll be no more dancing," spoke up one of the young men. "Gosh, what shall we do now?"

"Let's go down and look at the creek," suggested one.

The young folks who felt disposed for a ramble, struck off according to attraction, wandering through the cool woods down a gentle slope to the creek, which, even in midsummer, was

quite a stream, and made a rushing, soft music, as it flowed over its stony bed. On the opposite side there was quite a fall of commanding side-slopes, lined with smilac vines, and casting a cool, deep shadow on the running water. It was a cool day, and proved very attractive to young folk, who wandered up and away as inclination led.

Many of the girls is crossed the stream by the stepping-stones, which did not always prove a success. Some of the pretty damsels got their feet wet, and there were plenty of dainty shrieks, and appeals for help which brave gallants were only too glad to render. It was a splendid opportunity for lovers, who could have the protection of the party, and yet be so secluded as to whisper an eager word, or steal a pressure of the hand. These liked the walk better than the dancing.

Luke did not solicit the company of any particular girl; he wandered on, now with one, now with another; when he came to the stepping-stones he bounded across, climbed up the bank and followed a narrow path which led to the top of the cliff where it overhung the stream. He wished to get out of the crowd, and when he had found a spot sufficiently solitary, he threw himself at the foot of a large tree, leaned his head back against its shaggy bark, and gazing up at the sky through the softly-waving branches, tried to compose himself and become accustomed to the new situation in which he was placed by the events of the last twenty-four hours.

He had expected to marry Hetty—almost as certainly as if they had been engaged. It is true that her manner, when he had attempted a declaration, had thrown him back and kept him at a distance; but this he had attributed to her shyness mingled with a sense of coquetry. Her friend of the previous evening had been on his legs the snow-morn June. They had been in highest spirits all day; in an hour they were frozen into keeping him to stalk.

Luke was a brave fellow; he was well qualified to make his way in the world; he was not afraid of life's responsibilities; but the blow he felt as if he could not bear. To resign Hetty—and to that man whom he had disliked as soon as he beheld him—let because he was jealous of him, but

because his unreliable and yet audacious character was written on his face.

"Love him—love him!" he mused, bitterly, not without some contempt for the girl who could make such a choice.

As he lay there motionless, forgetting the flight of time in his reverie, he heard voices approaching. The first words which he distinguished were such as to prevent his making his presence known; he felt that he ought to rise and disclose it, but he was spell-bound by the intensity of his interest. It was Hester Barber who was speaking:

"You have no reason to call me false or a liar, cousin Joshua. I never said I loved you. On the contrary I told you that I did not; and you said that I would in time. Now I know that the time will never come. Upon meeting you again, I feel less like loving you than when we parted."

"Oh, yes!" burst in her companion, with a sneer; "there's an evident reason for that. I'm not so good-looking as the young man who kissed you, last night, on the door-step. Pretty conduct for a girl engaged to another man! You must be more careful, cousin; I don't put up quietly with things like that. I only wonder I didn't take his head off then."

"Then you were looking round, last night, playing the spy and eavesdropper, were you? Father always said that was your character; but I wou'd not believe it. Now I know it is true."

"I was going, tired as I was, to greet you, Hetty," he said, changing his tactics, "but when I saw you so comfortably engaged I concluded I wouldn't intrude."

"But it can't be true. That person did not stay five minutes, and you did not come up the road during that time. You must have been hiding somewhere in the dark, and I always thought it. If ever there was a spark of love in my heart for you, it is out now."

"Take care, Hester."

"It might as well be said now, Joshua. The longer I delay it the worse it will be for both of us. I don't love you—I don't like you—and how can you wish me to marry you?"

"I do wish it. And shall have it. If you think I'm

going to see myself cut out, after two years' waiting, you don't know me, that's all. I thought you had too much honor to go back on your plighted word."

"Did I really promise to be your wife, I do? No, I never did. You took my consent for granted. I told my father I allowed it to go so. You appealed to him for my love; you worked on my feelings until I consented to disappoint you, and tried to make up my mind that I would and ought to marry you when you came for me. But, I can't do it. Father will never consent. Oh, don't say any thing more about it, Joshua!"

His laugh had a hateful mockery in it which made Luke's blood boil.

"When I give you up, Hetty Barber, the grass'll grow blue and the sky green. How many times has that other lover of yours kissed my wife? Come now, own up!"

"Never, but that once—in many other ways! but even you, Joshua—you know it! But, you shan't call me your wife. I've made up my mind, now, I'll never be such to you, *never!*"

"You've got the Barber grit, too, haven't you, Hetty? But, it isn't equal to mine. You'll wear out first."

"You're mistaken," she said. Luke was astonished at her calm, decided tone.

A sudden change had come over the yielding and pliable temper of the girl; conscious that she had long pursued a wrong course, she had resolved to undo and correct the past. Something had given her courage and a sense of infinite power. It was the knowledge of her own heart; and that Luke loved her. Knowing this, how could she quail before the man who sought to intimidate her? The "Barber grit," as her cousin called it, would bear her through. If Luke could have seen her he would doubly have admired those clear eyes and the red spot on either cheek.

He was in a quandary. The couple having withdrawn on the other side of the tree, were carrying on their conversation in the absence of a listener. He knew that he ought not to listen; but he did not like to farther anger and mortify the rejected suitor by allowing him to know that he had overheard what had passed. At the same time a strange joy filled his

heart. His pulse beat in his ears with a sudden dizzy rapture. To hear Hester disclose that she never had loved her cousin, and never had told him so, was happiness after his late disappointment. What could he infer from what he had heard, but that she loved *him*?

He, too, resolved that she should never marry that man. If she loved him, (Luke,) which he woul^t ask her the first moment he had the opportunity, then he would claim her and hold her, against the world, if necessary.

"I shall tell your father this evening that we have been engaged two years."

"I shall tell him that I am sorry for it, and repent having acted against his judgment."

"Curse you," he said, grasping her shoulder so hard that she gave an exclamation of pain. "Let the matter drop then, if you'll have it so. But, I tell you, you never will marry that other lover of yours. I swear I'll kill him if I know of your giving him encouragement. Look out, Hetty Batter! The law can't compel you to marry me, after making a fool of me for two years; but, I can make a law to suit myself. If you ever engage yourself to *him*, whatever his name is, *he's a dead man!*"

This was more than Luke could bear. It was not then the custom of "the West" for men to put up with personal threats or insults. Individuals "made their own laws," to a great extent, and they were those of brave men, not of assassins.

He sprung to his feet, confronting the two pair.

"Hester," he said, "I have a right to ask you now, after what has passed: Do you love me?"

There was no time for blushes or coy reluctance; her face glowed and grew pale, but she answered as simply as he had asked,

"Yes, Luke, I do."

"Then we shall probably be married, in due time. Will you walk back to the picnic grounds with me?"

She left her cousin's side and took his offered arm.

Joshua's face was tallow-color. "Eyes dropper!" he said.

"By chance—not on purpose, as you were, last night."

"Don't talk with him, please, Luke, when he is angry," pleaded Hetty.

"Indeed, Joshua, I am sorry that you should be offended with us. Will you not be friends?"

"Yes, after this fashion!" he answered, striking Luke in the face.

Having the girl on his arm prevented Luke from warding off the blow which fell stinging on his cheek.

"Get out of the way, Hetty," he said; "go down the hill. We'll fight this out, now."

It was useless for her to cry and plead; the young Westone's blood was up; she, herself, could hardly ask him to submit to insult; but she trembled, and clung to a sapling, refusing to go away. The two men had closed in with each other. Luke was the taller and the more supple; his antagonist had more muscle. As they wrestled together, they approached the edge of the cliff. Hetty, seeing the danger of both, shrieked in her fright and terror; but they were too enraged to hear her warning; with pale faces and fiery eyes they strove for the mastery, until at length perceiving their whereabouts, each tried to throw the other over the precipice. Now one, then the other, was nearest the verge. Hetty, alarmed beyond the fear of displeasing her lover, screamed again and again. Presently Luke had his opponent on the brink, whose precarious foothold on the crumbling slate gave way, and the man went crashing down out of sight.

"Oa, Luke, I hope you haven't killed him?"

"I hope I haven't quite, Hetty. I must go and see."

She sank down to the ground, powerless with dread, while he hurried down the embankment, at an accessible spot, to see what had become of his rival. By this time Hetty's father had called all in that vicinity to the spot.

"Was it an accident? How did it happen?" they cried.
Luke, dusty, bloody with torn clothing, like Joshua after from the stream in which he lay drowning, and foul, laid him, with a deep cut across his forehead, insensible if not dead.

"Yes, an accident—done on purpose?" he muttered.

One of the young men carried the stricken back to the house, and sent for the doctor of the village, who was among

the guests. The rush and excitement over "the accident" was great; it was *the* sensation of the day. Nap felt that it was almost as good as if somebody's gun had "burst."

"How did you both come to go over?" asked one, observing Luke's condition, and attributing his bruises to a fall.

"P'raps he went over tryin' to catch the other one," some one made answer, seeing that Luke said nothing.

"The fact of the business is just here," said the young man, looking proudly about him; "it might as well be known first as last, though I'd like to spare Miss Barber's feelings. That fellow struck me in the face because I offered my arm to Miss Barber. I couldn't put up with that. We had a tussle, an' as one or the other of us had to go over, I concluded I'd rather have him go."

"Good for you, Luke!" "Served him right," cried a dozen voices.

"I had no choice. I did it in self defense. I hope he's not killed. What do you say, doctor?"

"Hard to tell. He ought to be taken somewhere and put to bed. He may never rally, or he may rally and have brain fever, or he may be as well as ever to-morrow, barring that ugly cut across the brow, which will mark him for life."

At this juncture Squire Barber came up.

"You served him right, Luke, if he is my own blood. I'm sorry he came to this country; but, since he's here, I'll do my part by him. He must be taken to my house."

The injured man, still insensible, was carefully carried home, and a bed made up for him in the sleeping-room. Of course this incident withdrew the Barbers from the picnic. Even Nap was willing to come away under the influence of so great an excitement. The doctor, and a neighbor or two, staid with the family until it should be seen whether the patient would sink and expire, or whether there were hopes of his rallying.

As for the people who remained on the grounds they had a new subject of discussion, and from that time forward for the customary nine days, Hester Barber's love-affairs were the engrossing topic of the community. The jealousy of the young men had led them into a quarrel. Some said that the stranger had the right of it, as Miss Hetty was engag'd to him,

and had "given him the mitten" to his face, in the presence of her new lover. Others averred that Luke could not have done otherwise than fight, after being struck in the face in the presence of "his girl." Whether the wounded man lived or died there was no thought of arresting Luke.

If men were denied the privilege of fighting out their rights and wrongs, nobody would be safe in that community, it was argued. If the young man wanted to fight for the girl it was nobody else's business.

"Dat feller's in a bad fix," said Napoleon to his mammy, after the exciting day was over, as he came in with a bushel-basket full of remnants which he had gone back to the grove to scrounge. "He ain't took no notice yit. I heerd de doctor tell de squire, as I was shurtin' de gate, dat he'd get percus-sion ob de brida. If dat *should* be a funeral, mammy, do you s'pose de squire would buy me a new coat, now dat swallow-tail's split up de back?"

"Go 'long, Napoleon, talkin' 'bout funerals. Dat young man ain't dead yit. He'll be as sassy as ever 'fore a week. De firs' new coat you git *will* be to Miss Hetty's weddin'. A gal wid two sech strings to her bow can't stay single long."

CHAPTER V.

THE GUEST THAT DID NOT COME.

JOSIAH BARBER did not die. He was confined to his bed a few days, feeling dizzy and sick when he attempted to sit up; this was the extent of his injury, if we except the ugly scar across his forehead caused by striking on the sharp slate-stone as he fell. This scar looked red and ugly when he was first able to sit up and take a look at himself in the little mirror which he asked Matilda to bring him. He muttered something when he saw it, the woman did not understand what. It was this:

"My scar looks worse 'an he has my face!"

The wound gleamed on his forehead lurid and red as a band of fire, and thereafter became a sign and signet of the passion which overmastered every other emotion in the bad man's breast—the banner of his hate and malice.

Hetty was kind to her cousin during his sickness; she paid him every possible attention, really feeling very sorry for him. In the abundance of her own happiness she could afford to pity him and give him her surplus tenderness. For she was now happier than she had thought a human being could be. She had explained to her father the relation which had existed between her and Joshua; which only a foolish girl long had prevented her explaining, and asked for his assistance to break it. The squire had scolded a little, pointing his remarks with the moral "when girls acted against the advice of their elders they were very apt to get into trouble;" he counseled her to be kind to Joshua and not needlessly to rouse the evil elements in his character, ending by hoping that he would return to the East, when well enough, without making any of them further trouble.

"Since I didn't confess to you before, I suppose I must be sure to do it this time," added Hetty, with one of her mischievous smiles, but looking down, as she said, in a shy voice—

"I'm engaged to Luke now, father. Have you any objections?"

"Oh, you can ask, when you know the will is in your favor! Supposing I should say 'no' to that?"

"Then we'd run away, father, for this is a real down-right promise, which I intend to keep."

The squire laughed and pinched her cheek.

"You'll be wanting to go to Cincinnati before long, to lay the wedding-dress—eh?"

"Not until fall, I reckon, father."

"There! you've caught that of Luke! He says 'I reckon'!"

"What's she cottedched of Luke?" asked Nap, who was always about when not wanted, coming around the corner of the house, as the two stood outside the back door—"de measles? I hope not, kase I've nebber had 'em!"

"Clear out!" cried the squire, vexed at his impudence, although he knew it was not intended as such. Nap thought best to "make tracks" to yonder, with his gravity unimpaired.

"I've only one trouble in the world, now," continued the girl, putting her white arms about her father's neck, "and that is, the hand which Joshua will bear to Luke. I'm afraid of the consequences, father. Somehow, I can't feel easy."

"Luke must be as considerate as he can—as careful, too. And I will try to persuade Joshua to go back where he came from."

And he did point out to the young man the wisdom of such a course. Joshua listened pleasantly, but quietly avowed his purpose to remain in the West and go into business for himself.

"Don't trouble yourself, squire, about 'my peace of mind'; you never have, hitherto, and I can attend to my own affairs as well now as before," he said, with quiet sarcasm, the blood mounting like a flash to the scar.

"As to Hetty, she needn't be scared for that lover of hers. I did make some ugly threats in the first moment of my disappointment; but we've had a square fight, and he got the best of it. I shan't never waste love on him, that's certain; but let bygones be bygones."

On this principle he seemed to have made up his mind to act. The friendly attentions which Hetty insisted on paying him appeared to have melted his resentment. He treated her kindly in return and even went as far as to say, one evening when she was trying on her hat, as he conjectured, to stretch down the road to meet her lover:

"I don't expect your beau is going to give up the house-plant of my being here. Bring him in. I was the first offender."

So Hetty brought Luke in, and a constrained interview followed, during which Joshua jested about his discomfiture to his partner and the glowing line on his half-scowlings; but, I pray thee, see that wisp on his lips; he hated at that moment more fiercely than ever.

Everybody was glad that peace was declared. From that day all took their usual course. Joshua had brought with him—no money; and had more coming to him, as the payment on the property he had sold at the East should become due. Squire Bertram did not feel agreeably about the money, knowing that it had been obtained either by unclean influence

over a sick man, or by forgery, but he deemed it best not to rake up old quarrels then.

Joshua had thought of setting up a "store," which, in that country, meant a place for the sale of all things salable, from a salt codfish to a silk dress. But, there was such a splendid opportunity for the making of a fortune by a saw-mill, to be erected on the stream into which he once had so seriously plunged—a tributary of the Little Miami—and which, flowing into the Ohio, would float his lumber down to Cincinnati, that, finding a partner willing to venture an equal sum with himself, machinery was ordered from below and the mill at once commenced. This enterprise absorbed the most of his time; he boarded at the Four Corners' tavern, and when he had a leisure evening which he did not spend playing harmless games of cards in the tavern sitting-room, he went usually to see the daughter of his partner in the mill—a pretty girl of a coarse and "homely," but with eyes black and dark enough to furnish an excuse for the attention which he was quite steadily paying. He seldom visited at the squire's; if he went there of an evening he was sure to meet Luke Norris. The wound on his forehead had entirely healed, and the cicatrized surface looked, ordinarily, like a pale stain; but when he met Luke Norris it flashed up hotly as it signified to Luke the danger that lay in his path.

Summer glided on into fall. Hetty was to be married in October. Luke hoped to get his house done in season to hold the "infair" in it, although the squire urged the young couple to spend the first winter of their marriage with him, pleasing the solitary condition in which he would be left. Luke had partly consented to this, but still hastened to finish his house, in order to have a grand reception (or, call it, to call it infair) the day and evening after the wedding. He was one of the first to patronize the new mill, as getting his lumber from there saved his boating it up-stream down Cincinnati.

In the mean time, the squire and his daughter made a trip to that city after harvest, and returned with a half-hundred weight of groceries as would stand even Nap's fat-little hands, and still leave plenty for the wedding-feast; Hetty, for her own particular share of the shopping-expedition, had a pair of

white satin slippers, a lace collar and a blue silk dress. The rumor of these things went abroad through the settlement; but no one was permitted to see the blue silk except the woman who was engaged to help to make it.

However, there came a time when suspense as to these matters was at an end—a magnificent day, early in October, when the sky was the bluest, the clouds the whitest, the forests one mass of crimson, purple and gold—a day neither cold nor warm, but full of sunshine and the balmy odor of dropping leaves—the year's second perfect day—Hester Barber's wedding-day.

The invitations had been out for a week. High and low, so that they were honest people and good citizens, were invited. The little house was not expected to hold them all, and had been enlarged by the addition of a temporary room built of boards and canvas, in which the supper was laid. The ceremony, in case the weather was fair, was to be performed out-of-doors, under the great oak tree, whose branches now appeared like so many crimson banners fluttering in the breeze.¹⁶

Four o'clock in the afternoon was the hour at which the marriage was to take place, to be followed by a hot supper, and an evening of dancing and frolicking.

At the appointed hour everybody invited had arrived. The house was overflowed, and the young people were congregated under the tree and about the door like a yard-full of many-colored lillyhooks and roses. The squire had legal power to perform the rites, and had done it for many a couple since he came to the State; but Luke wanted a minister, and had sent to the next village for one, the Four Corners being blessed only with occasional visits of these good men.

The minister had come, as Sarah Brown, the tailoress, who was helping to dress the bride, announced, after peeping out through a window at the sound of wheels.

Mrs. Martin had got her supper in such a state that she could open her new yellow darning-plies and spate a few moments to see her darling missa given away. Nap, resplendent in a new jacket and one of the squire's stiffest stand-up collars, was marching up and down the road in front of the house for the double purpose of displaying his new

clothes and giving notice of the approach of the bride-groom.

At precisely four o'clock Hester came down the main stairs, kept in countenance by Sarah and two or three of her girl-friends. It was not the fashion in that primitive society for the bride to exclude herself from sight until the moment of the marriage; and Hester, being hostess as well as bride, had a double part to play.

A murmur of admiration was heard, like a sudden gust of wind in dry leaves, when Hester made her appearance.

The blue silk fitted beautifully to the trim waist, above which the fair round shoulders rose white as foam on the sea. A wreath of small white roses circled her head, making the rich, dark hair look still darker by contrast; the wonderful white-satin slippers, as marvelous as Circé's in the eyes of that company, peeped from beneath the skirt; all the luster of the lustrous silk. The downcast lids, hiding the sparkle of the too-happy eyes, the wavering color coming and going in her cheeks, was a "sight to make an old man young."

Joshua Barker saw it all, not indifferent it would seem, for while he laughed and jested continually with the handsome brunette by his side—Kitty Emberson, the daughter of his mill-partner, who evidently was flattered by his attentions and whose loud voice and gay remarks kept a circle of admirers about her—his face was flushed and polished with the red wine glistened warmly. If any one present had particularly noticed the young man's manner, he might have inferred from the very frankness of his gaze that Joshua was not more at ease than an incubus, while holding applied the torch which the almanac declared to be fit.

Hetty had been oppressed all day by apprehension and evil. She could give this presentiment no shape, unless it might be that Joshua should pick a quarrel with Endeavor, or why she should fear this even herself could not tell, for there had been only friendly relations between them after the reconciliation.

Now, as she looked at Joshua, taking himself up to Kitty Emberson, she smiled at her own fears, wondering if there might not, possibly, be another wedding before Christmas.

But—it was a quarter-past-four! Who ever knew a bridegroom to be late? Hetty was ashamed to look at the clock; but other people studied its face, and looked out of doors, till to talking again, and again consulted the clock as the minutes ticked themselves away.

"Luke isn't up to the scratch?" said a rough old lumberman, chuckling the bride-expectant under the chin, who blushed and wished herself well out from under his twinkling eye.

The spire was too polite to appear to notice the lateness of the hour at first; but, at half-after-four, he, too, arose and took a long look down the road.

"I wonder what keeps Luke?"

"Curling his hair, I guess," answered Joshua, with an ill-concealed sneer. Luke had very fine hair which waved naturally and broke into ringlets at the ends.

Some of the young folks laughed; but many had begun to feel uneasy. Sid Napoleon patrolled in front of the house, keeping a sharp lookout over the corners of his collar, for he had an abiding sense that supper would not be served until the bridegroom arrived, and he was anxious for the arrival. Presently Martha slipped out to take a look with her own eyes, holding up her hand to ward off the slanting rays of the sun.

"All dat even-fall roast meat and fowls will be done as dry as a bone, Nap. I declare to gracious I feel uncommon uneasy. 'Tain't like Luke Norris to be 'hind time 'bout any ting, let alone his weddin'!"

"I tell you what to do," suggested Nap, looking in his number's eye. "Just let's hab de supper first and de weddin' to-morrow. It's too bad to spil all dat roas' turkey; de minister won't like it."

"Do yo' a s'pe—day'd eat widout de bridgroom, yo' s'pe?"

"Laws, yes, I w'y, I would. What's de difference? You can keep 'em hot warm for him. Hain't I better go an' take a look at de table, to see if dat ain't no eat's n'r nullin' there?"

"I'd rather hab a dozen eats dan you in da' Nap. You is goin' to be real all right, and I want dis quiet."

"Dar's a man comin'?"

"Who is it?"

"It's Mr. Norris. No, 'tain't, it's dat Jimmy dat keeps de pos'-offise. I s'pose he couldn't shet up no sooner, an' he's comin' to de weddin'."

Everybody looked eagerly when the postmaster came up the road, into the yard, and into the house. He walked fast knowing he was late, and there was a peculiar expression on his face.

"We thought it was Luke; did you see him anywhere?" asked the squire, coming forward to his guest.

"No, I didn't; but here's a letter for Miss Harry—a drop-letter."

Hester turned white as snow as she reached out her hand for the letter. A profound silence fell upon all. She saw at a glance that the writing was Luke's, and her trembling fingers could hardly break the seal. She did not pause to conjecture what the contents of the letter might be; but, opening it open, ran her eyes down the page. Those who were waiting anxiously for the result saw her turn crimson, then pale again, and put her hand up to her forehead, as if she had received a blow.

"What is it?" inquired her father.

She hesitated a moment, then looked up, and casting a rapid but woeful glance about her, said:

"Read it aloud, father. My friends ought to know how the matter stands between us."

The squire took the letter and read:

"HESTER: It is late in the day to tell you I have changed my mind. I hope you'll forgive me the trouble I've given you. I did think I would keep my word with you, up to this—six o'clock to-day—but I feel more and more that I was mistaken in thinking that I loved you as I ought to a wife, and—I will say good by before it is too late. I am going down to the city to stay a while, till the storm blows over, thinking that is best for both of us. So adieu, farewell, and may you be happier than you would have been married to me."

"LUKE"

"The infernal scoundrel!" burst from the squire's hoarse lips, after a silence in which a pin might have been heard to fall. "The infernal coward has carried out, eh? May a

curse follow him like a shadow, and a father's hate sting him like a serpent's fangs. By heaven but I'll—"

"Don't swear, father," said Hester, laying her hand on his arm. "I don't believe Luke is as base as you think him to be. Let him go, if he wishes. You wouldn't have any one marry me who didn't want me, would you?"

She smiled a wan smile, which touched every heart present, so that tears ran down many cheeks; but she did not weep. All kinds of indignant remarks and inquisitive observations were flying about. The company buzzed like a swarm of bees. Hester sat down beside the minister, pale, but self-possessed, and with a look of dignity surprising in one so young. Never had she appeared so beautiful as in the hour of her disappointment. In truth, the blow had fallen so suddenly and heavily as to stun her heart; it felt numb and lifeless in her breast, and she could keep up appearances before her guests, because the reaction had not yet begun—the intense, exquisite, unbearable pain which would torture her when her crushed sensibilities began to revive.

"Hang it," muttered the squire, pacing back and forth through the house like an enraged bear, "I must say you take it very coolly, Hester. My friends, we'll not be cheated out of our frolic by that young jackanapes, who didn't know his own mind. Hurry up your supper, Martha; and Nap, do you play like a very devil! We'll want music—ha! ha!"

"Don' know w'at *his* style of playing is, sah."

"Get out, Nap; do as I told you. Beg your pardon, person—I'm not commonly a swearing man; but there are some things that would make a saint drive a few nails into his talk."

Martha, assisted by half a dozen matrons of the company, soon had the supper dished; not a word did she speak to those who were helping her; her heart, as she declared afterward, "was a-chokin' her. It just swelled up inside her, like a batter-puddin' in a bag, and she thought she'd bu'st, shuah."

Not even when she went into the temporary supper-room, and caught Nap with a white mustache, which he had

borrowed from a handsome dish of "floating island," did she open her mouth. And this silence, coming like ice over a garrulous stream, spoke louder than any words, the severity of her disappointment. When every thing was in place, she cast a melancholy glance over the beautiful table, which it had been such a labor of love for her to prepare, and pointing Nap to a seat on a barrel in the corner, ordered him to strike up—

*"I would not live alway, I ask not to stay,
Where storm after storm rises dark o'er the way;"*

Nap began the mournful hymn, while the company marched in to supper; but was cut off in the midst of the second line by the squire, who thundered out again, forgetful of the person, who was behind him, with Hetty on his arm:

"What, you black imp, do you take this to be a funeral, hey? We'll all live as long as we can, and enjoy ourselves as well. I expect to dandle my grand-children on my knee, yet, to the music of that old violin. There's as good fish in the sea as ever were caught, Hetty, my girl! Give us 'Rory O'More,' and give it lively, too, Nap, or I'll box your ears!"

Thus threatened, Nap made the fiddle-strings creak. The squire, always a hospitable and jovial man, kept up a running fire of jests and quaint remarks. He was bent upon having his neighbors enjoy themselves, if they had been disappointed in the main feature of the entertainment, and he kept up his part so well that it was difficult to tell the real from the assumed mirth.

People easily reconcile themselves to the troubles of others. The guests enjoyed Martha's sumptuous supper and their host's volleys of wit and jollity almost as well as if the original programme had been carried out. Indeed, it may safely be affirmed, that, for some, the daintiest flavor, the spickest gusto of the banquet was imparted by excitement and curiosity.

Hetty still bravely bore up under her trial; neither affecting carelessness, nor yet betraying how deeply the mortification of her position was felt. A few tender-hearted women, more refined than the rest, looked at her,

proving their respect and sympathy by silence on the subject.

At last the endless banquet was over; she was at liberty to leave the table, but not yet to retreat to her room, to moan and sob in solitude. Some of the more considerate proposed going immediately home, but the squire, in the recklessness of his mood, insisted on their staying out the appointed time.

"The young folks must have their dance," he said. "Martha, where's that boy of yours?"

"Eatin' his supper, massa."

"Well, when he is done, let him give the signal."

Half an hour later he called again.

"Where's Nap, m'mumy? Tell him we're waiting."

"Eatin' his supper, massa. Do give de boy time to eat."

"Yes, yes, he shall have time. But, Martha, couldn't you barricade him with pies and cakes?"

"What, sah?"

"Couldn't you incase him with eatables, cover him with paste, like a blackbird in a pie, so that he could eat and play at the same time?"

"Don' know, maesa. He's mos' done, now;" and Nap actually made his appearance, rather short of breath, but still able to flourish his bow.

"It's a burlin' shame for massa to 'low dancin' to-night," muttered Martha, as she cleared up the tables. "I'd put wool in my ears if dat woud keep de music out. He might as well have fiddlin' on Miss Hetty's grave--dat's so. I should think de squire was in liquor, ef I didn't know better. Dat ledger's turned his head so's he ain't hisself. If I could only take dat darlin' chile on my ole breas' and see her hab her cry out!"

No one had the presumption to ask Hetty to dance. She had been sitting in a group of matrons, but being left by herself, by their changing their places, as the dance was at its height and the music the merriest, she was startled from an almost swooning condition, the result of her overtaxed efforts to keep calm, by the voice of her cousin.

Looking up, she saw Joshua standing before her, as if

asking her to lunge, his back to the company, so that she only beheld his face, and the scar glaring like red-hot iron. His bloodless lips were wreathed with a strange smile, while the eyes scintillated like coals in a furnace.

"Hetty," he said, in a low, husky voice, "it's a pity to have all this fuss for nothing. Supposing we have a wedding, after all?"

"Who wants to get married?" she answered. "Have you and Kitty made it up? Very well, there is the minister."

"I don't mean Kitty," he persisted, in an emphatic tone.

She tried to look interested, and he continued:

"I mean *you*, cousin. We were engaged once; why not renew the affair now? It will be the surest way of proving to Luke that he hasn't broken your heart. If you have the spirit I give you credit for, you won't pine long after him. He don't deserve it. Come! you are dressed as a bride, and a bride you ought to become. I have always loved you. What more faithful or trusty soul could you have? Come, Hetty, say yes, and we'll banish over this disappointment of yours with a sweet revenge."

She stared at him, as if not comprehending him.

"If you will say yes, I will speak to the spiritual about it."

"Would you have me, under the circumstances?" she finally asked.

"Many a love it is caught in the world, Hetty. If I could catch yours, I should be only too happy."

He pressed her hand against her heart, as if it failing to revive to a second pulse.

"It's a sin to let time to speak of it, John."

"There's no better time than now. You'll be the laughing-stock of the whole settlement, Hetty; all the gills and bladders will make fun of your wedding. Turn the tables, then, there, cousin. Show 'em yet you've spoken up to the mark, and I'll be an old fool of jolling at your expense."

"These are solemn words for my present state of mind. I don't know when I can't keep quiet, John."

"Say, Hetty, that you will. Say yes. I'm ready to marry you and to revenge you!"

The fire in his fond eyes seemed to swell and pale with his emotion.

She shuddered at its sight and trembled at the intense passion in his tones.

"I don't want to be revenged," she said.

"Well I do. You're my cousin. I shall take your part. I shall pick a quarrel with every man who laughs at you. Revenge is sweet when it is as just as it will be now."

"Please don't talk to me any more," she said, with a sad weariness which ought to have excited his compassion.

But, it was just that weariness and despondency of which he expected to take advantage; while she was too weak and stunned to resist, he meant to persuade her by the eagerness of his importunities. Seizing her hand he almost lifted her from the chair.

"Come, Hetty, come; we'll go together to your father."

"Let go of my hand, Joshua. You have no feeling; how can you treat me so, to-night? You are indeed cruel."

"Think of what people will say!"

Her lips curled; her pride was too great to care for the world's "say so." Luke had wounded it, but the gossip of neighbors could not; such an appeal moved only her scorn.

"Then you won't come?"

She looked away from him in stern silence. After a moment's study of her face he took her arm, and as he thus drew her attention he pointed to the signet scar on his forehead. She gave a little cry and sank back in her chair.

"Poor thing! you've overdone the matter, squire. I reckon we'll better all go home," said a woman near, seeing that Hester was in a sort of swoon.

The others, taking this plain hint, soon dispersed. Hetty was carried up to the little room, undressed, and laid in her pretty white bed. Sarah Brown remained to take charge of her.

"It'll be all right to-morrow," said the seamstress; "she's done out, now, but a night's sleep will cure her, as nothing is such ever to catch. You go to bed, squire. I'll take care of her. You, too, Martha. If you've got a few moments you may make her some strong lep-tea, in case she should be restless, and then you go to bed. You're tired."

"Yes, my heart aches," said maumy, "more'n my feet," and she went to make the lep-tea. "Nap, what you doin'

here?" she cried, as she stumbled over him, fast asleep on the kitchen floor. "If you had deight sort o' feelin' you couln't sleep like a pig, and yo'er young missus in such a fix. How-somever, he's miflin but a chile," she added, as Nap, grunting at her touch, rolled over upon a sponge-cake which he had taken with him to soothe his last moments of wakefulness; "his time'll come, too, I spose. Heigho!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHITHER, ALL WHITHER!

WHEN Squire Barber rose and came down the following morning, he was surprised to meet Hester up and dressed. She was pale, and her eyes were dilated with a light which made him feel more uneasy than he cared to confess.

"Father," she said, as soon as she saw him, "where's that letter?"

"Never mind the letter, my child," he said, thinking to soothe her.

"I *must* see it again. Give it to me, father."

"Well, here it is, if you must have it; I should think you'd had enough of it, Hetty."

Seizing it eagerly she scrutinized it, outside and in, the direction as well as the body of the letter.

"Father, that's *not* Luke's handwriting."

"What do you say, Hester?"

"It came to me last night, as I lay thinking it over, that the letter was a forgery. Now I see it is. Here is one of Luke's which he wrote me when I was in Cincinnati. Compare them, father."

"They look like the same handwriting to me. Never say they're not the same, I'll swear!" He pressed his lips together. "Hetty, what do you make of it?" he at length asked.

"Father, didn't you and all the relatives once accuse Joshua of forging a will?"

"We did," he answered, gazing into her bright, intense eyes.
"What then?"
"Joshua wrote that letter."

"How can you say so? What makes you think so? If that's the case, what became of Luke?"

"He has murdered him. I dreamed it all, last night."

"Child, Hester, for God's sake don't go crazy," cried the squire, a terrible fear possessing him, as he noticed her looks. She shuddered and pressed her hand over her eyes.

"I'm not crazy, now, father, though I don't know but I shall become so. Something must be done! *Something must be done*, I say! Now, this moment! I will find him. Oh, Luke, Luke!"

"Stay!" cried the squire, seizing her outstretched arms; "do be quiet, Hetty, my little girl. Sit down," forcing her into a chair. "Leave it to me; I'll do all I can. I'd take the letter down to the Clerks and see if others pronounce it a forgery. I will learn where Luke went, and when. You would feel too sick if I should find that he had gone safely off in the presence of a dozen acquaintances."

"I should look for joy, father. Hank, who's that?"

Rushing to the door she met Joshua Barber. She shrunk back as if from loathing and fear.

"What have you done with Luke?" she demanded.

His pale face grew perceptibly paler and the scar blazed out redly.

"What have I done with Luke?" he repeated.

"You have murdered him! Yes, Joshua Barber, you have really murdered. I understand that miserable, forged letter, which Luke could no more have written than he could have put it in my eyes with fire. I see it all now. I should have known it in a moment had I not been so stunned. As it is, I could think, it all came to me:—murderer!"

He sprang from the ironing voice and looked; he did not speak again, as he said, with angry violence:

"Have done! You can be made to repeat such words. I'm a relation of your runaway lover. Squire, is the girl insane? I'm afraid she is."

"I don't know," answered the perplexed squire; "things look rather equally in all directions. Come with me, Joshua;

I shall go to the Corners and find if any thing positive is known in regard to Luke's movements. Have you heard any thing?"

"I heard he made up a valise full of clothes and started down toward the river. People think he took a small boat and rowed down to the next village, where there was a flat-boat ready to start for Cincinnati."

"It's easy to ride to the village; it's but ten miles. I'll make it my business to go there to-day, Hetty, and see what news there is. Eat your breakfast, daughter, and keep yourself quiet. If I hear of Luke I'll come straight back and let you know."

"Better take a cup of coffee, first," said Joshua, "there's Martha bringing it in. Let me look at the letter, won't you, squire?"

The squire was about to hand it to him when Hester springing up and interposed:

"He mustn't touch it, father. Give it to me to keep. I shall hold it as evidence. I know its value too well to let its author touch it again."

"Well, I must say she seems sane enough," muttered Joshua, visibly under the influence of surprise and fear. "Since my own cousin calls me such bad names, I'll wait outside till you drink your coffee, squire."

As he passed out, he cast a single glance at Hester, which made her shrink, but not with fear for herself. A fury serpent seemed to lay upon his ghastly forehead and to glim from his baleful eyes. She sat silent a few moments while her father snatched a hasty breakfast, but, as he arose to go, she flung her arms about his neck, whispering in his ear:

"Dear father, I can not keep still. I shall be out looking for his corpse, I know. All I ask is, that you do not expose me by telling me and others that I am crazy. I shall be mad if you thwart me. All that will keep me sane—that will keep me alive—will be the freedom of doing what my brain prompts. Oh, father, I feel terribly—I feel it pressing on and on in her heart. It seems to me as if I ought to be doing something! As if the whole world ought to be trying, working, trying to find out Luke! Perhaps he is not yet dead! I feel as if he were lying in some dark spot,

It is dreadful! I must begin to look for him. And, father, don't trust that murderer! You ought to have him arrested at once."

" Hetty, I don't know what to make of you! I can't have a man and a relative arrested for murder on no proof but mere suspicion. Do be quiet, my dear girl, until I get back!"

"Look for proofs, father. Don't let him turn you aside. But go—go! every moment is a torture." She fairly pushed him away.

The gentle girl was indeed changed in mood and manner, so as to alarm her friends. Thinking it best no longer to delay, the squire set off for the Corners, feeling as he had never before felt; he knew not what to say to the man who walked by his side; he dared not suspect him of so terrible a crime, and yet, something in his daughter's words and looks had convinced him that there was cause for suspicion.

"Don't make any bones about it, spite," said Joshua, bitterly, after they had walked on some distance without speaking. "By all means have me arrested for the murder of your daughter's lover, because he took it into his head to run away. The fact that I also am so foolish as to like her, ought to be enough to condemn me, hain't it? Don't spare me on account of the name or the blood! Just me at once; try me by black-law, and hang me, if possible, before there's time to start in the runaway. I'm willing. You'll not find me the person to run. Now the thing's been said, I will insist on being tried, so as to give me a chance to clear myself."

"No one's said it but Hetty," was the uneasy reply,

"Yes, and before night every tongue in the settlement will repeat it. I shall be a branded man; twice branded," he added, pointing to the red scar on his brow. "He gave me a blow, and she will do me the greater wrong, by burning the stain into my gravestone."

"P'raps not. P'raps not. We may hear, the first thing, that Lake's doings were known to a dozen. If that proves to be the case, it'll end the matter at once. I shall go home and tell Hetty she's making a goose of herself. But, if it seems probable that Lake has been fully dealt with—that that latter was a traitor—then, let the man that did it beware! He's as I've got, and I shan't see her happiness ruined,

without moving heaven and earth for justice, to the criminal who he may."

Joshua smiled to himself with an exciting expression which escaped his companion's eye.

"Luke is cunning," he said, "I always knew it. He's got off, no doubt, as sly as a weazel in the night. I reckon, before hand, that he will not be heard from—that no man or woman will be able to tell at what hour or in what direction he went. I saw him, at half-past nine, yesterday morning. He came to my mill to get some boards for his floor—he wanted them laid, this morning, for dancing this afternoon, he said; and I promised to see to it. If I had a gun in his hand then, I recollect.

"You'll doubtless find out what he did, after that, by due inquiry. In the mean time, I intend to stay about the Four Corners. I shall be at the tavern at all hours today, and at my mill at the mill to-night. If any citizen comes which justifies the citizens in arresting me, they will know where to find me. But, mark you, squire, I've heard a good deal of wrong from Miss Hetty already; this last touch is half extra! After this affair I allow, it will go hard with those who have persecuted me. I warn you, and others, in time. There are such things as damages for slander to be obtained in a court of law, to say nothing of more sudden and satisfactory justice of a personal kind!"

Had the red line on the forehead been given a tongue, it would then have hissed, so alive it had become.

By this time the two men had reached the corner, where they found an unusual number of neighbors about the post office and tavern. People were talking over the arrival of fair of Hetty Baker's wedding. Joshua turned and went into the tavern. Quite Baker kept on until he came to the post office.

"Anybody heard anything further than I do, Norm?"—inquired.

"Not as we know of."

"Anybody been down to his house?"

"Guess not. Why should we interfere with his business?"

"Well, neighbors, to tell the truth, my mill's taken it into her

head that there's som'ns foul play. She says that letter, come to look at it twice, isn't Luke's handwriting. She thinks somebody's forged it."

The two women stared in each other's faces, and at the squire.

"What do you think work is that?" asked one.

"That's it, means; who would? I tried to persuade her out of the notion, but I couldn't. She's perfectly set about it. To satisfy her, I've promised to do all that I could to look up Luke, even if I have to go down to Cincinnati, and hunt out his stepping place there. It'll be curious if we don't find somebody who saw him start. If two or three of you will go with me, I propose to visit his house, and look about the premises. Granny Lane, who was in charge there, told me, last night, that he hadn't been in the house since early in the morning. She rather expected him to come in the afternoon, and give some directions about affairs for the next day. But he didn't come. He must have started in the forenoon.

"That letter wasn't dropped more'n half an hour 'fore I took it out," said the postmaster.

"Did you see him when he put it in?"

"No, I didn't. I waited until about half-past three. While she'd started to to the weedin' quite early; but I wanted to stay in the shop a little longer. 'Bout half-past three I went up stairs to sick up a little for the party. There wasn't nothin' in the box when I went up. When I came down, I had to see to the cow and give the horse some oats, seein' as we wouldn't expect to get home till late. It took me longer to do my chores than I'd reckoned on. I was mighty fendered to be outside for the jin-jin, but I just took a look in the box and I didn't notice nothing. I reckon, than any thin' else I seen, I could a better. I was surprised, when I got it up, to see what it was for, as it wasn't mail-day; I thought the writer was Luke's then. I wasn't certain, and I took it away off my shelf right from me as quick as I could, as I didn't see nothin' but somethin' unusual about it."

"I always say Luke wrote the sneaking thing," said the squire. "He always grew wrathy when he thought of it; "but

I've promised Hester, and must see to it. Who'll go down to Luke's premises with me?"

Every man present was eager to accompany him; so that quite a little crowd started off in the direction of Luke's new house, which stood quite near the river on a gentle hill that sloped down to the water's edge. The first thing they looked for, on reaching the spot, was Luke's boat, which usually was kept moored by a tiny dock that he had built into the water. It was not there. They then entered the house. This was still far from being completed. The first coat of plaster was not on; the floor was not even laid in the large front room. But the other rooms had been neatly cleared out, and were hung with evergreen wreaths, and branches of hand-tinted maples and beeches, to cover the roughness of the walls. A bed was made up in the last sleeping-room, and here some of Luke's clothes were laid out. He had used the room for several weeks as a sleeping-place, taking his meals with a family with whom he had long tarried. Granny Lane, an old woman, who went out to do day's works, had been employed by him to sweep out and prepare the place as much as possible; himself putting the wreaths, while his landlady had promised the necessary pavilions, which were to be erected and brought to the house, all but the coffee and tea, which could be prepared in the new kitchen.

The visitors found nothing to indicate their friend's one way or the other. If Luke had wilfully deserted his girl, it was evident that he had not made up his mind till the last moment, as his preparations had gone on without a hitch up to the time of his disappearance.

From the house they went to his landlady's, who was sitting, with a perplexed look, in the midst of her mother's of presents, cakes, speculating upon the propriety of calling it a "break-down" as a means of getting rid of them on hand. She repeated what she had told the spider and others the previous evening:

"That she couldn't account for it—noways! She never was so beat in all her life. Norris hadn't seemed to have a care on his mind, except to get some boards laid down in the parlor for a floor, so's to have the use of it at the

infit. He'd took a look at her cakes and custards and things, on that mornin' afore he went out, and he'd looked as happy as ever she see a young man, and had complimented her cookin' like everything. The last words he said, when he went out, after breakfast, was to warn me not to get so deep into the flour, as not to be able to get out in time for the ceremony. 'Don't forget four o'clock, whatever you do,' he said."

"Did he have a valise with him?"

"Yes, he said he was goin' to take a couple o' changes down to the new house. He should dress there, in his own bedroom."

"That looks suspicious, at all events," remarked one. "Of course his valise was packed for a journey. He meant to give us all the slip."

"Tain't like Luke. I never was so deaf," reflected the woman.

"We're all puzzled, that's so," said the postmaster; "all they went away as much 'beat' as the good housekeeper herself."

"I reckon we're on a fool's errand," remarked another.

"Let us trace him as far as we can, step by step," urged Captain Spire, upon whom his child's words had made a deeper impression than he was willing to admit, even to himself. "Joshua tells me that he came to the mill, valise in hand, at half-past nine yesterday forenoon, to see about the flour's for a temporary floun. We will find out all he has to tell us— which way Luke went from there."

"By hickey, square, you don't mean to insinuate that you suspect your own nephew of any thing do you?"

The whole crowd paused and gazed at Captain Barber.

"I might as well to if I didn't say anything to my man. If I've got to make, I make it boldy. Joshua Barber is a true nephew, but he's of my blood. That makes no difference. If he was my own son I'd see justice done to Luke. The two I've quashed, just we all know. The whole thing is very tantalizing. They may— mind, I only say they *may* have got him a dillidly. Joshua may have killed Luke in

another quarrel. If so, he is trying to hide the deed. Of course, it would have been better if he had confessed it. But I only suspect this. I've no grounds for it; I only want to trace Lake Norr's and his doings yesterday, up to the last movement. Surely it must prove that somebody knew something about him, after ten o'clock."

More silently than before, his companions turned their steps toward the tavern. The affair had a new importance, enough to make the chattiest of them grave.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEARCH.

JOSHUA BARBER sat on the "platform," which ran along the front of the big tavern, talking idly with two or three others, his hat slouched over his face to keep the sun from his eyes when the party returned from their exploration. He felt an influence pervading the air before he looked up and perceived the lowering and suspicious faces about him. He had never been a man to make many friends. He was looked upon in this community, where he had been brought up, as one who would make money in almost any enterprise he entered, but over-suspicious, and of unkindly temper. His partner, however, liked him. A "sister" fellow himself, he was not averse to the keen hardness of one of the young men, and had encouraged his attentions to his daughter. Mr. Enderson was sitting near Joshua. They had not gone to the mill, that day, nor set their hands to work, on account of the excitement. The two days of the wedding and fair were to have been general holidays, and this morning no one felt inclined to return to his regular tasks.

The squire made himself spokesman for the company.

"Joshua," he said, as they passed in front of the platform, "it would seem as if no one had seen Lake since he went to your mill?"

"Well, what do you make of that?"

"Nothing, as yet. But, as he was *not* seen to leave the mill, we want your account of his visit to it. Was any one else about there at the time?"

The young man pushed his hat back on his head so as to expose his face to the full glare not only of the sun but of the men about him; he frowned, but said calmly:

"I saw him leave the mill."

"In what direction did he go?"

"He crossed over by the dam. If I must repeat my little story, let me do it, from the beginning. About half-past nine yesterday, Luke Norris came to the mill; he came by agreement. There was no one about but myself, as the men were given a holiday on account of his wedding! (sneer). I had no business at the mill, except to oblige him. He wanted to look at some boards which I had to see if they would do for a temporary door. He said they would do better than nothing, and exacted a promise from me that I should deliver them this morning, and he would find a couple of men to lay them down in time for his娶亲. We didn't waste any extra time in polite conversation. He seemed in a hurry—smiling. He had a valise, well-packed, in his hand. He declared that it would be nearer to his house to go by the river. There was no way of going in that direction except by crossing the dam, which, as you know, has a foot-path over it. He went that way, and disappeared in the woods which border the bank of the stream. Whether any others saw him or not, I cannot say. There was plenty of chance. If Mr. Lathrop or any of his men were out of doors, they probably saw him."

"I don't see him," answered Emberson. "But, what of that, Robert? It's plain to me that he took that way to get away, and it sounds like it was to get away from some one or some provocation. He could have taken another road without getting into trouble."

"Are you certain he got over the dam?" asked Mrs. Weston.

"I will so. If he didn't, who would have dropped that little note to Miss Hester?"

Some of the men laughed at the covert malice in his last words; it made the squire angry.

"We shall search the premises," he said.

"Not without a writ," uttered both the mill-owners.

"Who is willing to make an accusation?"

No one seemed ready to answer. At that moment Hester Barber, with Martha in her wake, who had silently approached the scene, spoke out clearly:

"I WILL!"

Surprise was depicted on every face turned toward the young girl; her own face was white as snow; only the large eyes burned with a restless light which easily might have been mistaken for that of insanity.

"I will swear that I believe Joshua Barker murdered Luke—" her voice trembling on that name, but stopping herself again, "and I ask for a writ to search the mill. Here's the sheriff now, father."

"Shall we arrest him?" asked the sheriff, when the writ had been made out in the bar-room.

"It matters not. I want Luke," said Hester, in that strange, excited manner which filled the spectators with a sentiment approaching awe. "Come, Martha, we must not rest. I'm going where I believe I shall find him."

She did not go with the men to the mill. As fast as she could walk, with her old servant trotting after her, she went over the picnic ground, on toward the stream and the cliff from which Joshua had once been thrown. One or two persons followed from a distance, partly out of curiosity, and partly because her own determined air affected them to believe there really was something to be discovered. The stream was higher than it had been in midsummer; but the water was so clear that the bed could be seen without trouble. Hester waded in, knee-deep, to the foot of the cliff.

"Luke, Luke! I thought I should fail you here," she murmured. Nothing met her gaze but the masses of rock, and the flat slate-stones in the bottom of the rapid water. Then she began to wade down the stream, her eyes growing wilder every moment, fixed with an intense gaze of longing and dread, on the current through which she walked.

Martha, following her, on shore, with her hands

sighing, and occasionally breaking forth with the exclamation:

"Lord have mercy on us! we'll have a raving manacle wid us afore night!"

Down, down, she wandered, over the slippery bed of stones, heedless of those who accompanied, heedless of her drenched garments and miserable plight, looking with those intent eyes, so different from the bright and merry eyes of Hetty Barber, for the body of her murdered lover. It was a singular spectacle, considering how slight were the reasons she had for putting this construction on his disappearance. To her, the reasons were not slight. She imagined she knew Luke's heart too thoroughly to be thus deceived by him; also, that she knew the dark heart of another man well enough to believe him guilty of any deed, stimulated by hate and revenge.

In the silence of that numbness which had come over her the first night, she had heard Luke's voice speaking the truth to her; at least, so she believed; and when she recollects the singular movement which Joshua had made, of pointing to the red scar on his forehead, just before she went into her room, she thought the motion must refer to the scene at the cliff. She fancied that he had lured Luke to that spot, on some pretense, and there worked out his revenge for the defeat he had once suffered there.

But, Luke was not there. His white face did not lay itself up to the sky, with the limpid water over-running it as in her feverish imagination, she had made sure she should find it.

Wandering onward, she came in sight of the mill. The water grew too deep for her to struggle against, and she went on shore, hurrying forward to meet those whom she now perceived had completed their search, and were about to return to the Cottages. Squire Barber, for the first time in his life, would have been ashamed of his daughter if he had not sympathized with her plight to some much far appearances.

Poor, I followed, her sunbonnet in her hand, her dress clapping and clinging about her, she ran onward to meet them, as different from the beautiful bride who came yesterday with such sweet modesty out of her chamber, wreathed with white

roses and almost exhaling light, as it was possible she could be made by grief in less than one day. It wrung the rudest hearts, to see her thus; no one thought of jesting, though some of them were coarse, rough fellows.

"Have you found any thing?" she asked.

"No, my child. We find no reason for thinking Luke has been interfered with. But, to put a stop to talk, I intend, now, to ride down the road to the next village, and make inquiries. If he stopped there to take a boat to Cincinnati, I shall be sure to hear of it. Promise me that you will go home and stay there until my return."

"I can't promise, father. If I feel better, roaming about, what do you care? I hear Luke calling on me, all the time—that's the reason I can't rest."

The sheriff touched his torchard, looking at the postmaster, as much as to say that the girl's mind was ill ease. The squire saw the movement, and graced it bravely, for it corroborated his own fears. Joshua was with the crowd. He had been detained by the sheriff, while the examination proceeded, but was now at liberty to go or stay where he pleased. He remained with them, anxious apparently lest they should hold him, until he was cleared from suspicion.

The examination of the mill had been thorough; there remained but one more thing to be done, and that was a work of some hours—to drag the deep waters above the dam. It, for instance, Joshua had cherished feelings of malice and revenge, and had forged that letter to account for his master's disappearance, it was most likely that he had made away with Luke during that visit to the mill—when, however, a statement no one was present but the two men—it was quite likely that the murdered man's body was buried beneath the talus deposited in the pond, and it could have been easily removed or other disposed. Several persons, however, on observation and from the account given by Mr. Henderson's house, the man who had been seen in the village could have been there before the murder, and could not have been witness to any such a scene. Yet, however, it was done in broad daylight.

But, the tide of feeling was shifting back in favor of Joshua. Men were ashamed of the frightful accusation which

had been made. It was with difficulty that the squire could have men to drag the pond and the water below. However, he had persuaded half-a-dozen into what they called "toil's a day," and these idlers had begun their task, which they were to complete while he rode on to the village.

He took a private room at the mill, where he slept, and where he had a desk. It was a small affair, in the further corner of the mill, directly over the thyme. He had lodged there ever since the building was completed. This room he usually kept locked, and it was so found when the people went to search it, but he immediately unfastened the door and threw it wide open. His desk was examined, for stray scraps of paper on which might be found evidence of imitations of Luke's handwriting.

Nothing of that kind was discovered. The half office, half chamber, had a most peaceful and innocent air. There was a tray with a few carpenter's tools in it, and a fresh cleaving or two on the floor; but every thing about the place was few, and shavings and saw-dust were scattered in all directions, as a matter of course. There was a Bible on the desk, open at a well-worn page, with a bit of lead laid in it to keep open the place. It appeared as if young Barber had a habit of reading the good book before breakfast, or in the late night, and had made those emerge in the search tool as if they were at dubious work. The sight of that tool and the Bible, more than all else, had given them a consciousness of his innocence, and made them unwilling to go further in the matter.

"Well, Hetty, I hope to bring home tilings of him which will fit you best, easily enough, after that!"

Sophie struck her head and they walked on. Joshua, for the first time, showed symptoms of being ill at ease, as he took his cousin's wife, unusual looks and manner. He crept up to her side, saying, in tones which any might hear who chose:

"You've done me a deadly wrong, cousin Hetty; but I pray you will forgive it, because I feel that you are not yourself. I'm far more troubled about you, than about myself. Do be calm and reasonable. Go home with Martha and take proper care of yourself."

"Hain't swallered a mouthful sence yesterday noon?" interposed the colored woman.

"You'll catch your death in those wet clothes. Call up your pebble, cousin. I used to think you had plenty of it."

"Where is Lave?" she asked, fixing her eyes upon him.

He tried to raise her gaze firmly, hoping thus to get control of her, and induce her to give up her willfulness; but, his dark eyes flickered and wavered beneath her piercing look, and finally sunk before it.

"You ought to control her by force," he said, suddenly, to the spire. "If her reason is not already hopelessly affected, it will be before long, if this strain upon it continues."

"I don't know what to do," said the father, in despair. "Hetty, come home now; I want you to give me some lunch, so that I can start instantly for the village. I want to get back before dark." He spoke to her as he would to an infant or a spoiled child.

By this time they were opposite the tavern; all the men stopped there, except Sophie Barker, who went on with the two women.

"Be quick, Nellie," said Hetty, when they were again home; "you have nothing to eat. Tell Nap to saddle his horse."

Nap was nowhere to be found, and Hester herself went to the stable and turned the horse around. She was sure enough to know what would quickest bring about her purposes.

As soon as her tailor-trail departed, which he did before twelve o'clock, she went up to the bureau which constituted part of the furniture of the sitting room, and taking them carefully picking out a ring of two or three roses which Lave had written to her at different times, she endeavored to compare them with the letter in her pocket. But, when she took the pocket for the letter, it was not there!

"I've lost it," she said to herself. "I shall be sure to find it, when he walks by my side. Ah, my God! it only makes my certainty more certain."

Hearing her moan, Maria, who was listening at the door, stepped in, and going up to the girl, she lifted her in her stout arms as if she were a child, and pressing her to her bosom, she rocked back and forth, saying:

"Do cry, honey; do jus' cry now! Do you heap o' good. I'se lub to see de big tears come rattlin' down like peas. Jus' cry all you wan' to, my blessed chile."

"Wait until Luke's body is found. I'll cry then; I can't now."

"Won't you take off dese wet clo'cs, honey, and drink a good hot cup o' tea, which I'se got ready in de tea-pot, Galin'? You know you'll want to be strong 'nuff to go to de funeral if dey *should* find do body."

It was a queer appeal; but it had the desired effect. Hetty said she would go up and change her stockings and dress, and come down and drink some tea, if Martha woul' go back to the mill and find out if the men had discovered any thing. So maumy sent her up stairs while she went out to get the tea.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NIGHT VISIT.

When old Martha got in the kitchen she found Nap there.

"Ho, Napoleon, whar' you done been in dis emmaginey? Here's de square wanted his boss in de gretes' hurry. Mi's Hetty she saddle him, herself?"

"Golly! did she, maumy?" Nap raised his head, which had been drooping on his hand in an attitude of despondency. "I'se mighty sorry. I feels dressful bad for Missa Hetty. I'd — I'd — go widout eatin' a week, if I could set her up ag'in all right. I'se been a-fishin', maumy. Wen I feels bad I as likes to go a-fishin'. I can set an' reflect ober it."

"Dat's so," consented maumy, with a realizing sense of all her troubles, that she was the mother of a very remarkable boy. "Wat did you reflect ober dis mornin' Napoleon?"

"O, lots o' tings. I sof' dar en de bank, and de red an' yellow leaves showed in de water, and der wasn't nob'ody around. I kep' my line as still as a shadow, an' I thought 'bout Missa Hetty, how she didn't eat no brike-cake las' night.

nor taste dat sweet stuff in de glass dish, cos I sot and watched her wile I played on de violin, an' I seen it stick in her throat when she tried far to swaller a hale piece o' biscuit like a fish-hook sticks in a fish when it's swallered it—only dat never happens," he added, *sotto voce*.

"Poor honey," moaned maumy, pouring out the tea in a pretty white cup which belonged exclusively to Hetty.

"Missa Hetty mus' t'ell dried fact," continued Nap, reflectively, watching his mammy put sugar and cream into the tea. "Ef you'd pour a little more water on dem ar' tea-leaves I'd take a cup myself. I'se berry thirsty; fishin' allers makes me dry—I sot and wondered how a person could feel so bad as to spile dur appetite. I don't believe I ever feel as bad as *dat*, mammy; and I wondered what Miss Green would do with all de wittals she cooked up for de infir; and I thought what a fool a young gentlemun mus' be to run away from a party gal like Miss Hetty an' from two such tip-top sappers. I'd nebber be such a fool!"

"Dat's so," said maumy, who was spoiling Hetty's tea with an extra spoonful of sugar, while she lingered to hear Nap's thoughts. "Nobody knows how precarious dat boy's intellects is, but me," she continued to herself, as she carried the cup into the main house. "Fix yerself some tea, Napoleon," she called back, adding—"de poor boy needs it, arter all dat fishin' an' feelin' bad. It allers seems to make him hungry to git melancholy about tings. I member when dat pet reeon died, I had to brile a chicken for him, he was so down-cast. An' when he's studied a spell in dat reafer Missa Hetty gib him, *dat* allers set him raving hungry. Poor Napoleon, I'se afcared he'll be set back in his readin' now, we's all got in such trouble—and he was a-gitting along so beautiful!"

But, Martha was in too great anxiety, to ponder long over Nap's brilliant qualities; the first sight of Hester's pale face—who had changed her dress and come down with that nervous haste which now characterized all her movements—drove him from her mind. The young girl tried to smile as she took the tea, and the sight was more painful than tears. Taking a few sips, she said:

"You promised to go, Martha, to the mill."

"Yes, yes, honey, I'se a-gwine. Drink it all."

The dose was bitter and sickening, for maumy had made it strong and sweet, but Hester swallowed it, and it doubtless did her good.

"You'll stay here till I come back?"

"Yes; I will, if you hurry, Martha."

"Oh, I'll run, Missa Hetty. I'll be back in no time."

In a very brief period, considering the length of the way, the faithful servant was back with word that nothing had been found and the men had ceased work.

"Now, Martha, I'm going to Luke's house. Will you go?"

"Sartingly; to de ends ob dis yerth, ef you say so, chile."

The two again set out for the new house. When they reached it Hester went all through it, into the cellar, up into the garret, searched the spring, the piles of rubbish scattered about; and then went down to the river, gazing at the wide and turbid waters as if she could wrest their secrets from them.

"Oh, Luke," she cried, with clasped, outstretched hands, "I can't find you. And it's getting late!"

Her despairing glance turned to the western sky down which the sun was hastening. Martha sat on the steps of the new house, resting her tired feet, which were nearly worn out with following her young mistress.

"Come and set here a spell," she called; "mble 'twill do you good."

Hetty came wearily and laid her head in Martha's lap. The day was bright and exhilarating, as only a western autumn day can be. Bright leaves fluttered down about them, perching as tropical birds; the river grew rosy in the silent beams of the descending sun.

"How lovely it is," murmured Hester, after a time; "what a joyful home this would have made. And to-day I shoul' have been here—his wife! if he had not been cruelly murdered. Martha, how can we stop—how can we sit still, when we've not found Luke?"

"Laws, honey, what shall we do, now?"

"Somewhere, Martha—anywhere! I've sat still too long! Come, poor old maumy, I know you're tired, but we must go."

They wandered all over the place, and then back home to find if the squire had returned. Several of the neighbors had called, out of mingled sympathy and curiosity, and were chatting together until some one should come in, Nap having taken in a fresh supply of provisions and gone off on another "detective" expedition.

They all beset Hester to "be reasonable," and "to eat," and "to go to bed," and "not to take on," and so forth; but, she scarcely appeared to hear them, looking out constantly for her father and walking up and down the room.

About sunset he came. His daughter met him on the step; he shook his head in answer to her appealing look.

"Luke hasn't been seen down there. The man who lives on the dock is positive that no such person came there yesterday. He knows Luke well. The boat started on her trip this morning, and there was no such passenger aboard."

"I knew it, father!"

"Hetty, girl, how you look! Can't some of you women-folks do something with her?" he asked, in desperation, seeing how her eyes glittered, and that round red spots were coming on her cheeks.

About eight o'clock that evening Nap was sleeping soundly on the kitchen-floor, moaning and snorting by turns, dreaming that he had swallowed two grindstones without chewing them. The neglected state of the wedding-feast had given him opportunities which he had improved to bring him as near to the verge of dyspepsia as it was possible for his ostrich-like digestive apparatus to approach.

Martha was in the new room, attending to her delayed duties there, when a light figure stole noiselessly into the kitchen and a soft hand shook the sleepy boy again and again.

"Nap, Nap, awake! I want you to come with me!"

"Why, what's dat?" he exclaimed, at last, sitting up and rolling his eyes about him. "Is dat you Missa Hetty? I 'clar to gracious I thought it was a ghos'!"

"But it's not, Nap. It's only I, who want you to come with me. Father would not let me go, if he knew it, and I ought not to go alone into the power of that man. I want you for an escort, Nap."

"Oh, Missa Hetty, I'se willin' to be your discord anywhere

only I'se dreckal sleepy, an' tired out, fishin'. Whar' d'y'e want to go?"

"To the mill, Nap. I want to speak with my cousin. I must speak with him!"

Still that rapid speech, that intense look, which had so much power as even to draw Nap up from his first slumber and cause him to follow her as faithfully as some great Newfoundland dog.

"Hurry, Nap, and move softly, or they won't let us go."

He shuffled after her out into the chilly night. She had a shawl thrown over her head; but poor Nap had no extra covering and shivered as he came out of the warm kitchen.

"I hopes I shan't take cold and get a cough and go in a quick consumption, Miss Hetty," he chattered, as he ran along by her side. "It's beriy unhealthy gwine out in de night air widout no oberecoat. Ef de squire would jes' make me a present of his old one, I shouldn't be in sech a fix, when I had occasion to wait on my missus out ob nights, which I'se partikeler proud as I has de honor," he added, as soon as he had time to remember his manners.

"Here, take this," she said, throwing her shawl over his shoulders as soon as his words impressed themselves upon her consciousness, which was not immediately.

"Oh, golly, Missa Hetty, I'se not so bad off as dat. I may catch cold; but I'se willin', if it'll do you any good."

"I don't need the shawl, Nap. Indeed, if you knew how hot my hands were, you'd see I don't need it. And then, we are walking so fast. I can't take cold when we're walking so fast."

"Whar we gwine, missa? not in dem dark woods, I hope."

"To the mill, I said; I must see Joshua Barber."

As they approached the mill they could see a light shining over the dam from the one window of Joshua's room.

"He's there and not in bed yet. Hurry, Nap."

"Golly, missa, I'se got de neurology, now, in my side."

But Hester had no pity for the pain in his side; she ran on through the weird, white moonlight which shone down solemnly on water and mill. When she reached the latter she entered and made her way at once to Joshua's door, although

she had never before been there, Nap panting and stumbling after. Her firm knock was echoed, as it were, by the sound of a falling book. The sudden summons had startled the occupant of the room so as to cause him to drop whatever he had in his hand; but he did not come to the door. He remained motionless, listening. Hester would not wait for further warning; she opened the door and went in. Joshua had risen to his feet, his face was blanched with terror, he seemed to expect the advent of some awful apparition. When he saw who it was, he burst into a nervous laugh.

"Oh, it's you, cousin Hetty!"

She came close to him, dropped on her knees before him, and uplifting her ghastly, fever-lighted face, began:

"Cousin Joshua, if I have ever wronged you, I beg your forgiveness. For the agreement between us, which I broke, I beg your forgiveness. Forgive me that I could not love you as I did Luke. You have your revenge for all. Oh, a most deadly revenge! Let it suffice. Only tell me, now, what you have done with him; that I may find his corpse, and dying of a broken heart on his murdered body, may be buried in the same grave with him."

The pathos of her gesture, voice and look were indescribable. He shook, as he gazed upon her, so that he had to support himself by resting his hand on his desk, which trembled beneath his touch.

"I didn't think his loss would make you like *this*, Hetty."

"What did you do with him?"

"Nothing—I tell you, nothing. If I had woul'd I be such a fool as to tell you? Would I bend my neck for you to put the hangman's cord about it? Don't be so crazy, cousin. Listen to reason; think of the proposition I made you, the other night. It's the easiest way out of this scrape; it will stop gossip, will prevent your being an object of ridicule. I'll take you back to the East, Hetty, for a wedding-tour. You shall see the old places, cousin, where we first learned to love each other."

"I never loved you—never—never!"

"Come! let us end the trouble quickly. By this, Luke is having a gay time in Cincinnati. Let us be as gay as he is—" he paused in the midst of his beseeching.

Something had interrupted him. A whisper filled the air. "Hester!" "Hester!" "H-e-s-t—"

It was Luke's voice—a faint, hollow tone that was more an echo than a real voice. It filled the room, yet it seemed to pass in every direction. It might float in on the solemn lake at night, or might rise from the rushing waters of the flume with a maledict doll rattling under the floor. Both Hester and Joshua looked about them and up into the air.

Hester rose from her knees and lifted her hand:

"Even the dead speak to prevent so unnatural a union," she said. "Luke's spirit rebukes me that I listen to you. It was only with the hope that you would tell me where he is that I came here."

Sar approached the window and looked out on the smooth green water that was slipping over the dam to be broken into a roiling and boiling torrent below.

"Joshua, once more, is Luke out there? under that dreadful dam?"

"It may be. He may have committed suicide rather than spend a life with my pretty cousin. Hester, I told myself once, when I first saw this scar on my forehead, that I would scar your heart as deeply. Luke has done it for me—better than I could. I believe now, cousin, you've a wound that will be longer healing than this on my face was."

"I'm sick thithering here—it stilles me. Nap, where are you? Come, let us go away from this man."

She staggered to the door, where Nap had stood during the interview, and caught his arm.

"Take me out," she said.

He pulled her out, and when they were once more under the pure sky, she drew a long breath.

"I thought I was dying in that room, Nap."

"'Twas close in dar. I felt warm myself. Hadn't you better go back home, missa? Mummy'll be frightened out o' her senses when she fin's I'se gone."

They walked back more slowly than they came. A freezing horror crept over Hester when she thought of that little room, with the water under it, and the white moon looking in through the curtainless windows, and the whisper which had rose and trembled through it.

"It was no fancy," she murmured, "for he, too, heard it."

Was there, then power in a disembodied spirit to convey a message to the loving, desolate girl?

CHAPTER IX.

THE VOICE IN THE FLUME.

"I WONDAN' w'at under de sun become ob Napoleon Bonaparte," grumbled Martha, after breakfast the next morning. "I hain't set eyes on dat boy since sunrise, an' it's de fust time I eber knew him to forget when breakfas' time come. He's luf me wid ebry identical chore to do, an' we in dis distracting state. W'at wil tryin' to keep Miss Hetty in her senses. I'se afriad I'll lose my own. And now Napoleon's up an' gone a-fishin', cos he feels so bad, I spose—an' he's got a musin' ober de vanities ob dis worl' till he's clean forgot his breakfas'. Howsomeber," she added, as she took a look in the corner cupboard, "he hain't gone off entirely unperwided. Dat half a col' ham an' a loaf o' bread is a-missin', so I reckon he'll hol' out till he gits home ag'in, poor boy. Laws, Miss Hetty, I'se glad to see you a-takin' an interest in de kitchen ag'in."

Hester came in and sat down by the table. Any one could tell, by a peculiar expression of her eyes, that she had not slept; they were startlingly lustrous, with dark rings around them, the pupils enlarged, the iris contracted.

"Father won't let me set my foot out of doors. What shall I do, Martha? I must be going—all the time—all the time."

"De square better luf her hab her own way," answered Martha, not to the speaker, but to herself, with a sidelong look at the face of her young mistress. "W'at makes you be so uneasy, honey? 'Twon't do no good. Listen to reason of an ole black woman. Eider Luke is done gone down de riber, run away, an' let' you, else he's killed an' murdered?"

Now w'at good it do for you to go wanderin' roun' like a crazy girl? Ef he's dead, dat won't bring him back—ef he's runned away, dat won't bring him back. Tell you w'at I'd do, Missa Hester, I'd sue him for breach o' promise! Dat's de way to satve Luke Norris!"

Hester did not hear a word said. She was listening for footsteps which approached the house, and her wild eyes looked wilder as the door was pushed open and Nap thrust his head inside. Seeing who it was, she sunk back again, having half risen from her chair.

"W'at on yerth de matter wid dat boy?" exclaimed his mother; "he's as white as you is, dis minute, Miss Hetty"—which was a natural exaggeration—Nap not being snow-white into several shades—but, bleached out he certainly was, into a curious color like faded purple calico.

Nap fastened his eyes on Hester with a strange look out of which she could make nothing, then rolled them around an' round as if they revolved on axles.

"Whar you been, you good-for-nuffin?"

"Fishin', maumy."

"How many fish did yer catch?"

"Only one, maumy, and dat was a frog."

"Frog, humph! Well, whar's dat? I'll brile de hin' legs for de square. He didn't eat a thimblefull o' break-fas'."

"Dey's briled an' eat a'ready. I se sorry. I disremembered de square liked frogs, so I made a little fire an' roasted it myself."

Nap had now advanced into the room, and stood directly in front of his mistress, staring at her in the same odd way; he had dropped his fishing-tackle on the step. It was evident to Martha that he had something important on his mind; he was shaking, besides being bleached to that peculiar color.

"Napoleon Bonaparte Washington, if dar's any ting weighs on yer mind, de bes' way is to get it off, quick! Suthin's happened!"

His eyes ceased revolving for a moment only, to begin again more desperately than ever. Hester, who had caught some of the meaning of the scene, now looked at him in quiringly.

"Nap," she said, rising to her feet, "you've got something to tell me."

"Dat's so, only I dassent tell it. I'se been skeered to deef, Missa Hetty. If you'd look in my mouf dis mornin' you'd see half my teef was gone—done shook cl'ar out my head wi'l sight. Oh, I'se been awful skeered!"

"W'ma frightened you, Nap? Don't keep me in suspense."

"Was it a b'ar?" interrupted Martha, who had keen recollections of having once been pursued by one of those unamiable animals.

"A b'ar, maumy!"—disdainfully; "guess I'se not afraid of *b'ars!* No, Missa Hetty, 'twas a ghos'!"

"A ghost!" she echoed. "Who's ghost?"

He hesitated, and then almost whispered:

"I done spec' it was Massa Luke's."

"Nap, you great big fool, w'at you doin'?" cried Martha, sharply; "dis ain't no time to be tellin' your rediculous ghos' stories. I've a min' to box yer ears."

"Box 'em, maumy, I don' care. I ain't misteken dis time. 'Twas a right down sperit, an' no mistake."

"Did you see him?" asked Hester, scarcely above her breath.

"See him? Laws, Missa Hetty, who eber saw a sperit? In course I didn't see him, but I *heard* him, shuah."

"What did he say?"

"He said 'Nap—Nap—Nap!'"

"Oh, what a fool dat boy is!"

"Where were you when he said it?" continued Hester.

"Down by de mill-dam, fishin'. I was sottin' dar, as innocent as a lamb, arter I'd br'iled my frog, an' I heard a callin', I couldn't make out w'at. I didn't get no bites dar, on de bank, so, arter a while, I t'ought I'd go out ober de dam, on de footpas, an' t'row my line in dar—"

"I'se told you 'nuff not to go dar, Napoleon—dat you'd be drowned ef you did."

"Shet up, maumy, won't ye, w'en I'se a-talkin' to Missa Hetty! Well, I sees Massa Joshua come out de mill, an' I go ober to Emberson's for his breakfas', and I stood ol'er d.

I am and t'rew in my line, and I heard sussin' say, 'Nap—Nap P?"

"Well?"

"Golly, I tell you I mos' dropped in de water. I looked up to de sky, and down in de water an' all roun' in de air, and I seen nuffin. Dar wa'n't nobody 'round, nor a soul in dat mill, 'cause de hands hadn' come to work yit. It sounded to me as if it come right out de water itself, an' I t'ought de debbil was to pay, sure 'nuff; so I cut back to de bank in a hurry. Den, w'en I di ln' see no ghos', nor de debbil nor nuffin, I t'ought I we'll ln' gib it up so, an' I trabbled back out ober de dam ag'in; an' hadn' more'n t'rrown my hook in de water 'fore I hear dat same voice sayin' 'Nap, Nap,' kind o' soft an' weak I tell you I di ln' stop dat time, till I made a straight streak home."

"How did you know it was Luke's voice?"

"Pears to me I ought to know Massa Luke's voice by dis time. He's been drownded in dat pond, an' his sperit is gwine to haunt it. Golly, dat'll hurt de mill business, an' I se glad of it!"

"Did he say any thing but 'Nap?'"

Hester had her hand on the boy's shoulder; her eyes burned with devouring eagerness.

"Don' min' dat poor fool, honey," urged maumy; "he's allets seein' or hearin' spooks. Why, he seen one only las' week, out in dis yarl, an' when I went out, 'twan't nuffin but a w'ite towel flappin' on de clo'es-line."

"What else did he say, Nap?"

"H—s——! For G—d's sake get me out o' this!"

Hester gave a scream.

"I thought I'd come home and ask you to come, Missa Hester, to see if you'd hear it, too."

"Yes, yes, this minute I'm ready, now; come, Nap; don't wait."

She caught up Martha's huge bonnet and ran out of the kitchen, stole out the front gate, and when once on the road, ran so fast that the boy had difficulty in coming up with her. As she passed the Corners she dropped into a walk.

"We must be discreet," she said; "they might stop us,

or follow us, if we acted too much as if I were crazy. Yes, yes, we must be discreet. Nap, did you bring your line?"

"I cotched it up widout knowin' it; here 'tis, missa."

"Well, we must fish. I'll go out on the dam, and throw the line in. You can tell me the place where you heard the voice."

"Dat's so. Stop a minit, missa. I want to put a worm on dat hook. Laws, I shouldn't wonder if you'd cocta a fish de fust throw. Dey say it's a fool for luck; but I neither had none. Laws, I was so skeered. But I don't feel so now. Ef I should hear dat same, in your comp'ny, I shudn't run."

"The more the merrier," said Hetty, with a smile.

The poor child knew not that she spoke or smiled; she was conscious of a desire to reassure her companion, to keep him with her until she obtained from him the desired information. Her heart was throbbing violently; all her calmness was assumed. A strange hope thrilled her—a hope that hung on the frightened words of an ignorant boy.

Ah! how slender the thread!

But, she clung to it as the dying to life, or the drowning to straws. Presently they reached the pond, spreading out smoothly in the rosy morning air. The "hands" were now in and about the mill. Hester took the rod and followed Nap out on the perilous path by which the dam was sometimes crossed. As they came about in the center of it, he stopped.

"T'row in yer line here," he said.

She threw it in as if she had done nothing but fish all her life.

All was intensely silent, for the mill was not yet in motion; the dull roar of the water over the dam seemed only to create an atmosphere of sound in which the silence floated. Nap could hear the heart of his young mistress beat. A minute—five passed. Then something nibbled at Hester's hook, and she drew it up with a silvery fish flashing at the end.

"Well done!" shouted a rough fellow from the shore, and some of the men began to lounge on the bank and laugh.

"I reckon dat ghos' don't talk in broad daylight," whispered Nap, as he took the fish off the hook.

Hester heard the men jesting at the mill, and saw Joshua looking out of the window. She threw the line in again; maumy's big bonnet shaded her wild, white face.

"Nap, I hear him. Don't speak or stir for your life!"

The boy caught her arm, almost throwing her over the fall.

"Dat's so—he's callin' us ag'in."

Now, blended with the dull roar of the water, came another sound—a human voice, low, suppressed—either from the necessity of caution, from weakness, or both.

"God bless you, Hetty! I see you. Do you hear me?"

She snatched the bonnet from her head, turned her face toward the mill and nodded assent.

"Get me out of this, quickly. I am almost gone."

"Nap!" she cried, "do not make an outcry. Go as quickly as possible for father, and other men; tell them to come here. LUKE IS IN THE FLUME; AND HE IS ALIVE!"

"Golly, Missa Hetty, I'se afear'd I'll fall, I'se so dumbfounded."

"Go quickly. Do not hurry until you get out of sight of Joshua. Every minute is important. Do you understand?"

"I'se a nigger, missa, only sixteen year ole, but I'se got some gumption. I'll carry dat message in a bee-line."

"Do, good Nap. I'll stay here. Tell father to bring others."

"Yes, missa."

He slided by her, on the trembling beam, and walked off down the road whistling "Sittin' on a Rail," as if he had not a care on his mind. Hetty drew up another fish. The fellows about the mill laughed and thought it good fun.

"Where are you, Luke?" she said, softly.

"In the flume."

"How shall we get to you?"

"Go to Joshua's room and take up the floor."

"Yes, I understand."

She began to trill a little song. Presently she spoke again:

"Can you hold out until father comes?"

"*I'll try, my darling.*"

"It won't be long."

"*I can wait—now that I see you.*"

"He is coming."

She tossed rod and line into the pond, ran along the beam as if it had been solid earth, and sprung to meet the squire, who was hurrying down the road, with two of his neighbors. Nap had met him, coming to look for his daughter, and had delivered his message.

"In the flume—in the flume! God of mercy! how has he existed there eight-and-forty hours?"

The men did not say much. Hester spoke to her father, and turned with him toward the mill. Mr. Emberson and Joshua were both in the office. Squire Barber caught up an ax which lay near at hand.

"Come, Joshua Barber," he said, "we have an errand to your room. Show us the way."

"You've meddled with my room about enough. Aren't you satisfied yet?" answered Joshua, with a half-suppressed oath.

"Come along," said the others, pushing him roughly.

His partner followed, and the crowd nearly filled the little room.

"Shut the door," ordered the squire; "Joshua may want to take French leave, and I want him here to enjoy our proceedings."

They closed the door.

"Now, boys, that chisel," pointing to one in the tray of tools.

He began to loosen a plank in the floor, while the occupant of the room, with his back to the wall, glared upon those about him like a panther brought to bay. He was pallid to greenness; the line on his forehead was of a ghastly blue. He knew that his crime was about to be discovered; but still had no idea that his devilishly-concocted scheme of revenge was thwarted by some unforeseen Providence. The thought that his victim would be brought out alive did not enter his brain. As Hester's eye met his, he smiled, and repeated the motion toward his forehead. She understood the malice of

the smile, and answered it with one so triumphant that his gaze turned into one of astonishment.

"Now, boys, let 'er rip! Up with the boards!"

They removed two boards of the flooring, and peered down into the dark waters which filled the flume to the depth of sixteen or eighteen feet. The sides of the flume-box were smooth and slippery; there was nothing to cling to; it was like a hideous well.

But there, as the light from the opening above gleamed into that boiling vortex, a man's head appeared above the water, which was up to his very lips—up to his lips—but not over them. Stout arms were thrust down, and with a great shout, Luke Norris was dragged out of his watery tomb and laid upon the floor. His eyes wandered until they met Hester's; then closed, and he slipped into insensibility.

They laid him on Joshua's bed, the touch of which should have been enough to revive him.

CHAPTER X.

A STORY AND A FEAST.

JUST a week from that bright Tuesday in October in which the guests had gathered to a wedding which did not take place, they assembled again at the same house. There was not one who would have been induced to stay away. Such a drama, so near to being the darkest tragedy, never had before been enacted in that rude settlement. Everybody wanted to see the man who had lived forty-eight hours in a mill-flume, without sustenance, and almost without hope. Everybody wanted to congratulate the bride, and to see how the bridal wreath and dress bore a second inspection. Such a merry company never, before or since, gathered together. People could not look at each other without laughing. Such a joyful termination to their fears and perplexities made them gay; their sympathy with the woman who had borne her faith in her lover, and her perseverance in the search for him, to such a triumphant conclusion, was almost hysterical.

When the bride came out of her chamber, this time, she was greeted with smiles and tears; ay, with laughter and sobs, and something like a suppressed cheer from the men.

The bridegroom was present, sitting in an arm-chair surrounded by all the old ladies of the country, looking just "pale enough to be interesting." Martha was flying in and out as if shod with feathers, her face beaming with tropical sunshine, while Nap was as irrepressible as a bottle of ginger beer. . . .

Hetty had completely spoiled him, the last few days; as since the fishing expedition which they undertook together, nothing was too good for Nap, nor was there too much of it. She had made him a sky-blue silk stock, with her own hands, above which his immense collar arose like two peaks of the Alps. . . .

Luke had been at the squire's, recovering from the effects of his hardships, and giving Martha time to duplicate her store of dainties, and for the invitations to be renewed. Now the hour had again arrived; as the hands of the clock pointed to four, Hester made her appearance, Luke rose to meet her, the minister came forward, Nap ceased to play strange noises on his fiddle, the simple marriage rite was performed, and the two were pronounced man and wife. Then went up a shout which shook the air, and would have been heard at the Four Corners, only there was no one there to hear it: "All the world and his wife" were at the wedding.

Yes, one person had staid away. Poor Kitty Emerson, who really had loved Joshi, and had been led to think that he loved her, until his crime having come to light, revealed that he had used her friendship only as a "cat's-paw."

"Tell me all about it, Luke. I hain't half heard tell how you got in, nor how you got out," said an old woman, hitching her chair up to the bridegroom's, as he, still weak, sat down, after the ceremony, with Hester's hand clasped in his own. . . .

Her request was seconded by others, who had not yet had their curiosity fully gratified. He looked at Mauney, who moved away toward the kitchen as she said:

"I se'll gib you ten minutes to tell yer story, Massa Luke."

"That's more than enough, Martha. There's not much to

tell, though it seemed long enough while I was enduring it! I'm certain I thought and suffered a good many books full, if it were written down; but, it's past, and I've nothing to show for it, but a face a shade less brown.

"Well, friends, I was very anxious to get the floor laid in my parlor in time for the infair. (It's laid, now, and you're all invited to dance on it to-morrow night!) Joshua Barber kept putting me off about the lumber. I could hardly tell what to make of it. I thought he still cherished a spite against me, on account of that scar on his forehead, and wanted to inconvenience me. Still, he was mighty pleasant, promising certainly to have the boards in time; yet he didn't deliver them, and when I went to see him about it, the night before the day of the wedd'ing, he again said he'd just got them sawed that day, and if I'd come up in the morning and look at them, he'd engage to see they were delivered in time. So I went to the mill, the first thing after breakfast, for I wanted the matter off my mind, and he showed me the lumber, and I said it would do. Then he said he wished I'd stop in his room a moment, while he made out the bill. I was in a hurry, but said I'd stop long enough for that. I followed him into the room, where I'd never been before; he went to his desk a moment, asking me to look at the window—that he had a nice view, said it was quiet there—entirely private, that he had the room built on that side of the mill, over the water, on purpose to have it secluded. He talked very fast, seemed excited. As he turned from the desk and approached me, I also ceased looking out the window and fixed my eyes on him. His voice was strained and unnatural, his face was white, the scar on his forehead was a dark red, he looked threatening, yet he tried to smile, and kept up his chat about the view, privacy, and so on. I felt, magnetically, that I was in danger; that he had lured me there for some evil purpose; unconsciously I braced nerves and muscles for a sudden assault, looking him sharply in the eye as he advanced.

But I was unprepared for what really happened. I saw him make a motion with his foot, pushing aside a bolt and block under his bed. I expected him to attack me. I did not expect, as it were, the solid earth to fly from under me. But this it was. In the twinkling of an eye the floor gave

wry under my feet and I was plunged into the cold waters underneath. As I went down, I heard his devilish laugh. When I came to the surface the first time, he was grinning at me, as he turned the fatal trap-door back to its place. When I rose again all was dark. Faith, and his light and hope were shut out from me. I could not touch the door with my hand; it was too far above me; I swam slowly around that hideous prison-house; not a chink into which I could insert my fingers; not a peg, not a nail, not a rough place to assist in the slightest, my attempts to sustain myself. It was a cruel way to die. My enemy would have been more merciful if he had killed me with knife or pistol. I heard him go out and shut and lock his door and walk away. All hope deserted me.

"I thought, with agony, of my Hester; I realized that, in all probability, she would never know my fate. Strong as I am, I could not long support myself on that water; I went down the third time. As I did so, *my feet touched something which did not give way under them!* It was quite near the farther wall of the flume. I guessed instantly what it was. A piece of timber had been left there by accident. It afforded me a tolerably firm footing. As I stood upright, the water reached to my chin. I dared not stir for fear of losing my foothold."

He paused a moment in his narrative. All present knew and respected the strength and bravery of Luke Norris; now when they saw the sweat break out on his forehead, and his lip tremble at the recollection of what he had endured, they felt that he must have borne superhuman trials.

"The long, long hours crept on," he continued, smoothing his wife's hair as she hid her face on his shoulder. "I imagined what was going on in the outer world; I could see the people gathering; my bride arrayed in her wedding finery; could picture the disappointment, amazement, grief, which followed. Sometimes my brain whirled; I seemed to be falling and drowning, in spite of all my efforts to steady myself. But, the love of life, the love of this good angel, there was strong in me. I resisted death. I kept my tenacious hold, unrelaxed, through what seemed days and weeks. Yet it was but a single day."

"All was silent in the room overhead; all was inky darkness about me. I was cold. Finally I was aroused from a stupor which may have been a sort of sleep, by the glare of a light cast on the black waters. I saw Joshua Barber's face looking down into my prison: I knew, if he saw me, he would at once finish his work; and, strange as it is, I yet cherished hope that by some means, I could not conjecture what, I might get out of that flame. I was, fortunately, at the furthest end, and in deep shadow. He went deliberately to work, with suitable tools, to take up the infernal trap-door which he had constructed—on the principle of those from which felons are launched into eternity—and to lay down in its place bear is, which he fitted and nailed to the floor joists."

Again he paused, as it overcome by the memory of the sensations which oppressed him when listening to the strokes of the hammer nailing him down in that living grave.

"That was the most terrible of all those eight-and-forty hours. I knew then that I *had* expected in some manner to escape by the trap which was now so securely sealed up. I heard Joshua undress and go to bed.

"I knew when it came morning, by the light gleaming through two or three narrow crevices between the upper boards in the flame. These crevices were not large enough for me to get a hold upon the boards with my fingers, and the muscles of my limbs were strained and swelled to great pain by my incontinual standing on my feet, on that narrow beam. I found that I had, in my pocket, a small pen-knife. With this, slowly, for I could not reach very well, I enlarged the crevice which was on a level with my eyes, until I had made a small hole through which I could obtain a view of that glad and beautiful world from which I had so suddenly s�t out. I think this employment saved me from going crazy under the pressure of torture and suspense. I lay quiet in this until I could take no more, and then I lay down on the water I had brought with me. I lay, however, constantly, half conscious, as I lay in the bottom of Joshua's room, so that I could hear an outcry. When the man came in to examine it, I did not hear what was said, but I made a desperate effort to shout, so as to be heard. My voice already had grown

very weak, and the noise of the roaring dam so overbore it that I was not heard."

"Again I had the misery of hearing those who might have been my deliverers go away, leaving me to my fate. That night I heard Hester's voice talking with Joshua in his room. I called her. She says she distinctly heard me, but thought it the whisper of a spirit.

"I think that I slept much of the second night, standing on my feet. I kept hold of my chink in the wall, so that if I fell, my hold on that would sustain me. The second night did not seem so long as the first; I suppose I was more stupid. In the morning, looking through my crevice, I saw Nap come down to the dam to fish. His face, I assure you, friends, appeared as handsome to me as any human countenance ever had!"

"Dat's so!" interrupted Nap, who had been listening, among the others, with all his might. "I 'spec's I is purty good-looking most times—dough I didn't hab dis blue stock on, dat morning, shuah!"

"I didn't dare to call to him until Joshua had dressed himself and gone out to breakfast. I knew I had but little voice, and was afraid I could not make him hear. When Joshua left, I began to call. I saw, by Nap's air of astonishment, that—"

"Dat's so," again interrupted the colored hero; "I was astonished, no mistake. My wool straightened right out like w'ite folks'. I 'spec's it done mos' straight yet."

"He heard, but I saw also that he was frightened—"

"Me skeered? Not a bit! I run wid all my might to let Mi-sa Hetty know w'at was up. Nussin eber skeered me yet—not eben black b'ars."

"When he finally started and ran, I did give up in despair. My strength was exhausted. I felt that I could not hold out another hour. Oh, it was horrible!"

Hester was sobbing on his shoulder.

"There, don't cry, my darling. I was about to say that the moment when I saw that bright boy returning with you—saw you come out over the dam and pretend to be fishing—"

"Maumy's often said I was awful cate," again interrupted the impresible Nap, "and now oder f'ls found it out.

Guess she won't scold me no more for not catchin' no fish.
Dat war a mighty big fish I caught *dat* morning. Golly,
Mr. and Mrs. Norris, 'twan't a frog dat time!"

Hetty raised her head, wiping away her tears to laugh at Nap.

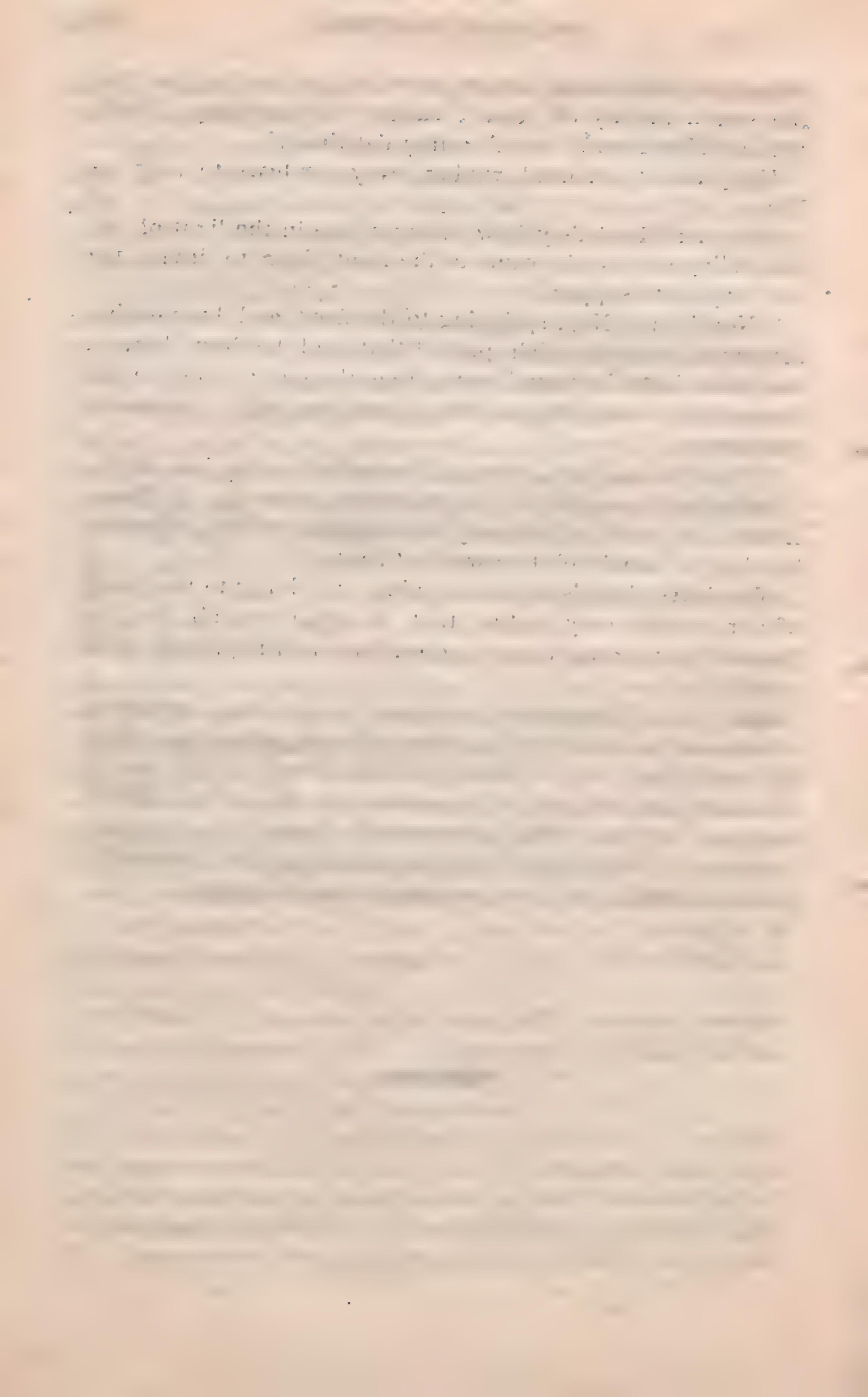
Just then Martha's yellow turban shone in the light of the descending sun as she came to the front door to invite the company in to supper.

"Now," said Nap, springing to the front and brandishing his bow in a style which proved that, had he been born a few years later, he would have been the glory of our dusky 'minstrels,' "Now, Mr. and Mrs. Norris, lead off! No foolin' dis time!"

"Tain't a bad ideⁿt, noways," he added, under his breath. "I'se quite raconstiled to sareumstances, arter all. If Massa Lake hadn't been pickled away in dat flume, awhile, I shouldn't hab had de benefit ob two weddin' feastes."

We leave Lake's house-warming and infair to the fancy of our readers, only hinting that the affair was all that his generosity and superabounding gratitude and happiness could make it.

The Four Corners was destined to one more sensation, which was, to learn, the morning after the infair, that Kitty Elaberson had taken advantage of the absence of his guards, to loosen the doors of his temporary jail for Joshua Barber, and led him, by means of a small boat, to parts unknown. Poor girl! May her devotion have received a greater reward than there was any reason to expect.



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